

MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE

Vol. XLIX

August, 1913

Number V

THE TRIUMPH OF THE SOUTH

NOT ONLY IS THE SOUTH "BACK IN THE UNION," BUT SHE
STANDS AT THE HELM OF THE SHIP OF STATE

BY JUDSON C. WELLIVER

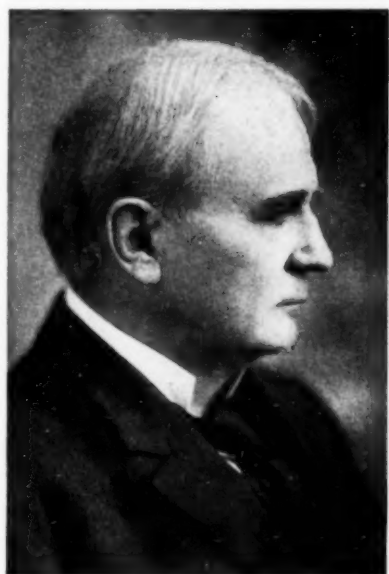
IT needs not the seventh son of a seventh son to take notice that the South is back with us. Take it any way you will, that's a big and significant fact. Note a few details:

The President is a native of Virginia.

The Speaker of the House is a native of Kentucky.

The leader of the House is a native of Kentucky.

The leader of the Senate is a native of Virginia.



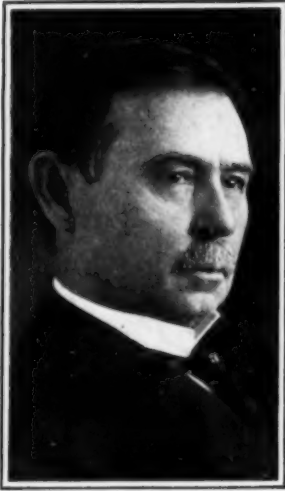
CHAMP CLARK, OF MISSOURI, SPEAKER OF THE
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*From a copyrighted photograph by Harris & Ewing,
Washington*



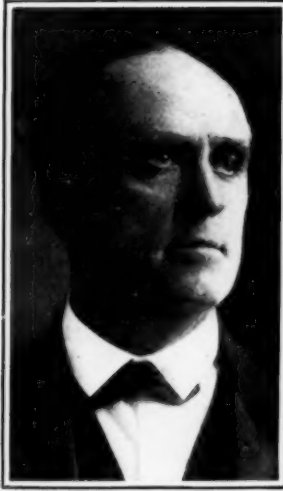
OSCAR UNDERWOOD, OF ALABAMA, LEADER OF
THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*From a copyrighted photograph by Harris & Ewing,
Washington*



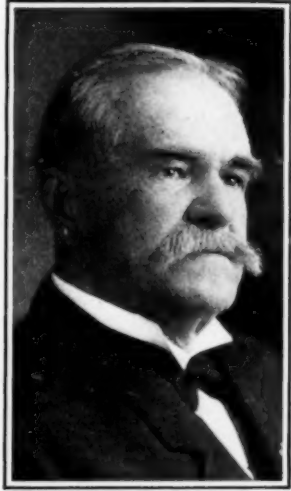
SENATOR SIMMONS, OF NORTH CAROLINA, CHAIRMAN OF THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

From a copyrighted photograph by Harris & Ewing, Washington



CONGRESSMAN PADGETT, OF TENNESSEE, CHAIRMAN OF THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NAVAL AFFAIRS

From a copyrighted photograph by Harris & Ewing, Washington



SENATOR JOHNSTON, OF ALABAMA, CHAIRMAN OF THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON MILITARY AFFAIRS

From a copyrighted photograph by Harris & Ewing, Washington

The ten members of the Cabinet include one native of Texas, one of Georgia, two of North Carolina, one of Kentucky. Two were born under the British flag, and the other three are natives of Illinois, New York, and New Jersey.

The chairmen of most of the important committees of both Senate and House are natives of the South, and elected from it.

The Chief Justice of the Supreme Court is a native of Louisiana.

Aside from all this, the South is getting,



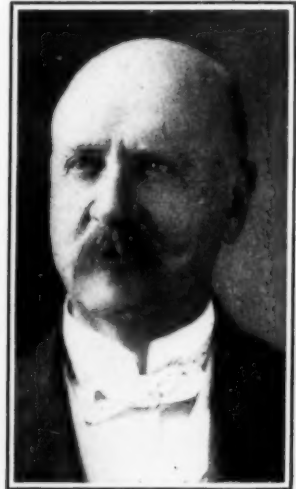
SENATOR TILLMAN, OF SOUTH CAROLINA, CHAIRMAN OF THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON NAVAL AFFAIRS

From a copyrighted photograph by Harris & Ewing, Washington



CONGRESSMAN FLOOD, OF VIRGINIA, CHAIRMAN OF THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

From a copyrighted photograph by Harris & Ewing, Washington



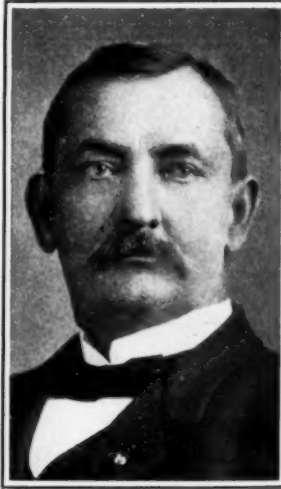
SENATOR BACON, OF GEORGIA, CHAIRMAN OF THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

From a copyrighted photograph by Harris & Ewing, Washington



SENATOR MARTIN, OF VIRGINIA,
CHAIRMAN OF THE SENATE
COMMITTEE ON APPRO-
PRIATIONS

*From a copyrighted photograph by
Harris & Ewing, Washington*



CONGRESSMAN ADAMSON, OF
GEORGIA, CHAIRMAN OF THE
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON IN-
TERSTATE COMMERCE

*From a copyrighted photograph by
Harris & Ewing, Washington*



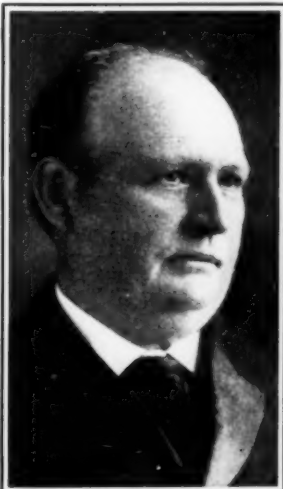
SENATOR GORE, OF OKLAHOMA,
CHAIRMAN OF THE SEN-
ATE COMMITTEE ON
AGRICULTURE

*From a copyrighted photograph by
Harris & Ewing, Washington*

in the general personnel of executive posi-
tions that are filled by appointment, a vast-
ly larger proportion of big and influential
posts than it has held since the Civil War.

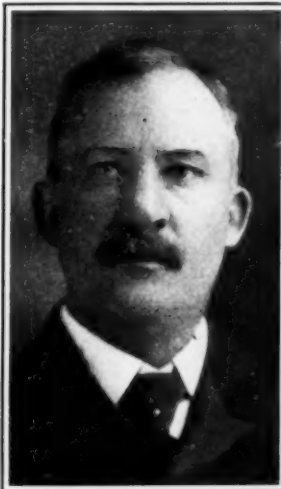
President Wilson was indeed elected
from the Northern State of New Jersey;

but his birth and education were Southern,
and practically all of his career has been
Southern with the exception of his years
as student, professor, and president of
Princeton, the most Southern of Northern
universities. He is a Southerner with a



CONGRESSMAN CLAYTON, OF ALA-
BAMA, CHAIRMAN OF THE
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
THE JUDICIARY

*From a copyrighted photograph by
Harris & Ewing, Washington*



CONGRESSMAN HAY, OF VIRGINIA,
CHAIRMAN OF THE HOUSE
COMMITTEE ON MILITARY
AFFAIRS

*From a copyrighted photograph by
Harris & Ewing, Washington*



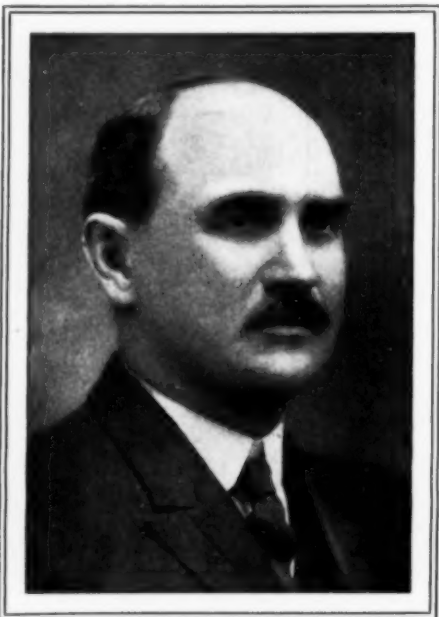
CONGRESSMAN GLASS, OF VIR-
GINIA, CHAIRMAN OF THE
HOUSE COMMITTEE
ON BANKING

*From a copyrighted photograph by
Harris & Ewing, Washington*

Northern experience and residence super-added; and that he has a fondness for men of that type is indicated by his generosity in naming them for office.

His Secretary of the Treasury is a Georgia-New Yorker; his Attorney-General, a Tennessee-New Yorker; his campaign manager and national chairman, an Arkansas-New Yorker; his ambassador to

North Carolina, appointed from Missouri, has as his assistant secretary Dr. Beverly T. Galloway, also a native of Missouri. The great Bureau of Internal Revenue, through which is collected annually a large proportion of the general revenues of the Federal government, has been placed under William H. Osborne of North Carolina as commissioner.



DAVID F. HOUSTON, OF MISSOURI, SECRETARY
OF AGRICULTURE

From a copyrighted photograph by Clinedinst, Washington

Great Britain, a North Carolina-New Yorker. The man popularly credited with most intimate advisory relations with him, Colonel Edward M. House, is a Texas-New Yorker.

This list of Southern men now occupying places of the foremost importance in the government might indeed be extended almost indefinitely. Indeed, the President is himself extending it whenever he sends to the Senate a list of nominations for places within his gift. In addition to making a native Georgian, William G. McAdoo, Secretary of the Treasury, the President has designated a distinguished Virginian, John Skelton Williams, of Richmond, to be dean of the corps of assistant secretaries. The Secretary of Agriculture, David F. Houston, a native of



JOSEPHUS DANIELS, OF NORTH CAROLINA,
SECRETARY OF THE NAVY

From a copyrighted photograph by Clinedinst, Washington

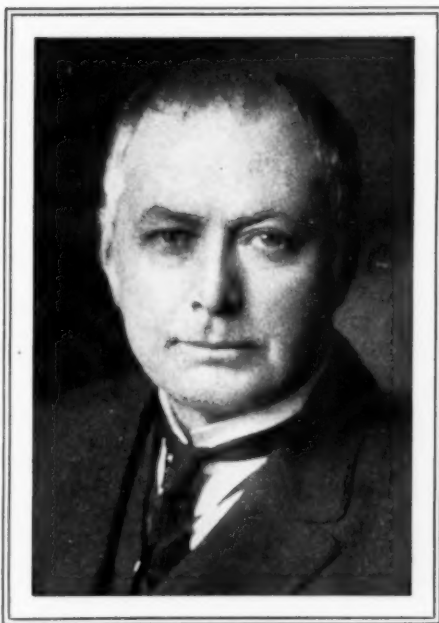
Not only is the Attorney-General, James C. McReynolds, a native of Kentucky and a political resident of Tennessee, but his first assistant, James A. Fowler, is also a Tennessean.

To be director of the Census Bureau the President has named William J. Harris, of Georgia. Edward K. Campbell, of Alabama, has been named as chief justice of the Court of Claims. Lucius Q. C. Lamar, of Mississippi, was chosen for recorder of the General Land Office.

One interesting selection of President Wilson has made Cato Sells, of Texas, commissioner of Indian affairs. Mr. Sells is that *rara avis*, a Northerner by birth who at middle life went South and made himself a first-rate figure in political life. He was a United States district attorney in

Iowa under Grover Cleveland, subsequently moving to Texas, plunging into politics, becoming one of the progressive Democratic leaders in that State, and now landing in a highly important post in the national administration.

A Breckinridge of Kentucky — Henry S. Breckinridge, a scion of the famous family that has produced so many figures in State and nation—is assistant secretary of war, despite the fact that he is well under thirty years of age. Virginia provides, in Robert W. Woolley, the auditor for the



ALBERT S. BURLERSON, OF TEXAS, POSTMASTER-GENERAL

From a copyrighted photograph by Clinedinst, Washington

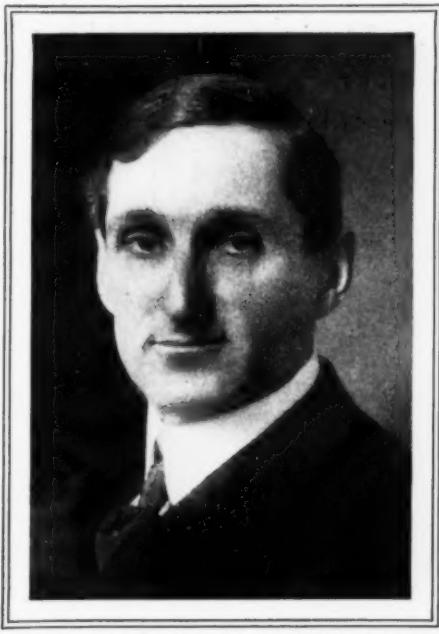
Interior Department, and in Ernest L. Jones, the new deputy commissioner of the Bureau of Fisheries. James L. Beity, of Missouri, is auditor for the War Department.

The diplomatic service has already received a decided sprinkling of Southern men. Its premier post, that of ambassador to the court of St. James, went to Walter H. Page, native of North Carolina and latterly a resident of New York. The ambassador to Italy is Thomas Nelson Page, of Virginia. One of the early appointments was Alexander B. Ma-



JAMES C. M'REYNOLDS, OF TENNESSEE, ATTORNEY-GENERAL

From a photograph by the American Press Association, New York



WILLIAM G. M'ADOO, BORN IN GEORGIA, SECRETARY OF THE TREASURY

From a copyrighted photograph by Buck, Washington



E. K. CAMPBELL, OF ALABAMA,
CHIEF JUSTICE OF THE
COURT OF CLAIMS

*From a copyrighted photograph by
Harris & Ewing, Washington*



W. J. HARRIS, OF GEORGIA, DI-
RECTOR OF THE CENSUS
BUREAU

*From a copyrighted photograph by
Harris & Ewing, Washington*



H. S. BRECKINRIDGE, OF KEN-
TUCKY, ASSISTANT SECRE-
TARY OF WAR

*From a copyrighted photograph by
Clinedinst, Washington*

gruder, of Maryland, to be secretary of
legation at Copenhagen.

THE SOUTH RULES THE COMMITTEES

Even more significant of the extent to
which Southern men are dominant is the
list of the chairmanships of the great legis-

lative committees of Senate and House.
Here we find the most complete proof that
the South is in truth in charge of the na-
tion's business.

Take the Senate. The majority leader
and chairman of the Appropriations Com-
mittee is Thomas S. Martin, of Virginia.



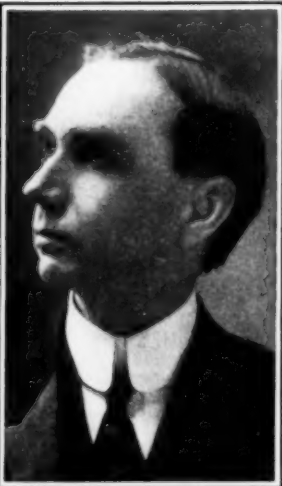
W. H. OSBORNE, OF NORTH CARO-
LINA, COMMISSIONER OF
INTERNAL REVENUE

*From a copyrighted photograph by
Clinedinst, Washington*



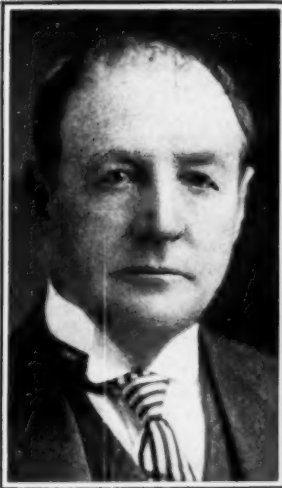
R. T. GALLOWAY, OF MISSOURI,
ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF
AGRICULTURE

*From a copyrighted photograph by
Clinedinst, Washington*



D. C. ROPER, OF SOUTH CAROLINA,
FIRST ASSISTANT POSTMASTER-
GENERAL

*From a copyrighted photograph by
Clinedinst, Washington*



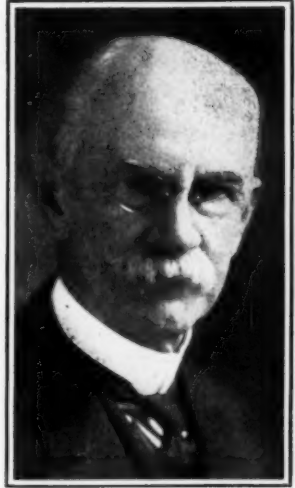
SENATOR NEWLANDS, OF NEVADA,
BORN IN MISSISSIPPI

*From a copyrighted photograph by
Harris & Ewing, Washington*



SENATOR POINDEXTER, OF WASH-
INGTON, BORN IN TENNESSEE

*From a copyrighted photograph by
Harris & Ewing, Washington*



SENATOR THOMAS, OF COLORADO,
BORN IN GEORGIA

*From a copyrighted photograph by
Harris & Ewing, Washington*

Senator Clarke, of Arkansas, is chairman of Commerce; Senator Furnifold M. Simmons, of North Carolina, of the great premier committee of Finance; Senator Bacon, of Georgia, of Foreign Relations; Senator Stone, of Missouri, of Indian Affairs; Senator Newlands, a native of Mississippi, of Interstate Commerce; Senator Johnston, of Alabama, of Military Affairs.

At the head of the Naval Affairs Committee is Tillman, of South Carolina; of Post-offices and Post Roads, Bankhead, of Alabama; of Public Buildings, Swanson, of Virginia.

The House committee list duplicates this showing of Southern preponderance in the places of power. Underwood, of Alabama, is chairman of Ways and Means, which



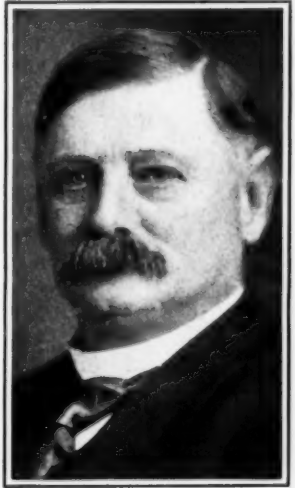
SENATOR SMITH, OF ARIZONA,
BORN IN KENTUCKY

*From a copyrighted photograph by
Harris & Ewing, Washington*



SENATOR MYERS, OF MONTANA,
BORN IN MISSOURI

*From a copyrighted photograph by
Harris & Ewing, Washington*



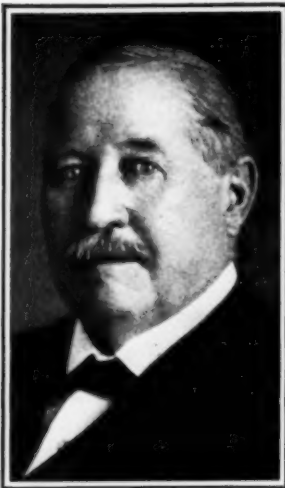
SENATOR SHAFROTH, OF COLO-
RADO, BORN IN MISSOURI

*From a copyrighted photograph by
Harris & Ewing, Washington*



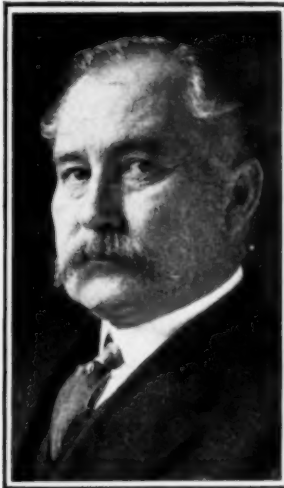
SENATOR PITTMAN, OF NEVADA,
BORN IN MISSISSIPPI

*From a copyrighted photograph by
Harris & Ewing, Washington*



SENATOR CATRON, OF NEW MEX-
ICO, BORN IN MISSOURI

*From a copyrighted photograph by
Harris & Ewing, Washington*



SENATOR FALL, OF NEW MEX-
ICO, BORN IN KENTUCKY

*From a copyrighted photograph by
Harris & Ewing, Washington*

also is the committee that makes all committee assignments. Banking and Currency is headed by Carter Glass, of Virginia. Mr. Sparkman, of Florida, heads Rivers and Harbors, and Asbury F. Lever, of South Carolina, is chairman of Agriculture. Military Affairs brings us back to Virginia, with Representative Hay as its head. Naval Affairs is presided over by Representative Lemuel P. Padgett, of Tennessee; Public Lands by Ferris, of Oklahoma; Labor by David J. Lewis, of Maryland; Rules by Robert L. Henry, of Texas; Interstate Commerce by William C. Adamson, of Georgia; Judiciary by Henry D. Clayton, of Alabama; and so on. On both sides, with hardly enough exceptions to be counted on the fingers of one hand, the important committee chieftaincies are in the hands of men of the South.

It must be remembered that appointments by the President have been comparatively few since the change of administration took place. Perhaps the

next year will give a different slant; but it is certain that at this time the expectation in political circles at Washington, inside and outside the administration's confidence, is that there will be little variation from the tendency thus far developed. All the way from styles in head-gear to opinions on the tariff, the flavor and the color of things in Washington are Southern.

"The South is back in the Union," observed one Northern man with a tone of satisfaction; "and it's going to be a good thing for both the South and the Union."

"Not only back in the Union, but in charge of the Union," was retorted; "and the necessity of taking a national view of national problems, under the lead of a man whose view is eminently national, is certain to broaden the South and its public men in a most desirable way."

The last Democratic President was Grover Cleveland, native of New Jersey, elected as a citizen of New York; but his was a very different sort of



SENATOR CHAMBERLAIN, OF ORE-
GON, BORN IN MISSISSIPPI

*From a copyrighted photograph by
Harris & Ewing, Washington*

Democratic administration from this of Woodrow Wilson. During the eight years that Mr. Cleveland was President he named twenty-three Cabinet ministers. The South drew only seven of them. New York State alone had five of them.

Yet the Southern and border States cast a comfortable majority of the electoral votes that went to Mr. Cleveland in each of his elections. They were decidedly in the minority in the column which supported Mr. Wilson last November. That is, Mr. Cleveland, whose administration was decidedly of the Northern Democratic quality, received more electoral votes South than North; Mr. Wilson, whose administration thus far gives every promise of being as Southern Democratic in tone as Cleveland's was Northern, received more electoral votes North than he did South.

For any other comparisons, it is necessary to go back a very long time. The last man who was elected President from a Southern State was General Taylor, born in Virginia and elected from Louisiana.

Of the first twelve Presidents, Virginia was the native State of seven. After that, for sixty-four years, Virginia furnished no President until Wilson.

The South's way of dominating political situations without actually counting a numerical control has always been one of the striking features of American political history. Down to the Civil War it was the general business of the South to direct national tendencies. It is not needful to recount the evidences of this supremacy. The old South had the faculty of keeping its strong men long in public life where, by reason of seniority as well as capacity, they rose to places of power. New England learned that trick, too, and in later years has been the section most to profit by it.

SOUTHERNERS FROM NORTH AND WEST

But the South has another faculty which counts strongly in the political game. It is clannish at home, but democratic away from home. By this I mean that the "native son" has a hold on a Southern constituency that he cannot exercise in any other section. A Southern district is well-nigh certain to be represented by a Southern man; but that doesn't at all hold as to Northern and Western constituencies. A Southerner may emigrate to North or West, and have an excellent chance in public life

if he has the talent for it; but the Northerner who emigrates to the South and progresses in that game is indeed a *rara avis*.

As the Senate is composed to-day, for instance, there are twelve Senators from Northern and Western States who were born in the South; but there is only one Senator from a Southern State who was born in the North—Mr. Reed, of Missouri, a native of Ohio. If you choose to call Missouri a border State, or a Western State, rather than distinctively Southern, then there is no exception to the rule. The South clings to its own; the North doesn't ask where you were born.

While the entire South, plus the border States, has just one Senator who was born in the North, the North and West have twelve Senators from the South and five who were born abroad. That is, out of thirty-two Senators from Southern and border States, only one was born in the North; but out of sixty-four Senators from the North and West, seventeen were born in the South or abroad. Could there be a more complete illustration of the South's disposition to hold all it has, politically, and reach out for all it can get?

Carrying this analysis a little farther, some more interesting details about the Southern Democracy's genius for absorbing to itself will be developed. The Northern or Western States which have Southern Senators are:

Arizona—Marcus A. Smith, born in Kentucky.

Colorado—Charles Spalding Thomas, born in Georgia; John F. Shafroth, born in Missouri.

Illinois—James Hamilton Lewis, born in Virginia.

Kansas—Joseph L. Bristow, born in Kentucky.

Montana—Henry L. Myers, born in Missouri.

Nevada—Francis G. Newlands, born in Mississippi; Key Pittman, born in Mississippi.

New Mexico—Thomas B. Catron, born in Missouri; Albert Bacon Fall, born in Kentucky.

Oregon—George Earl Chamberlain, born in Mississippi.

Washington—Miles Poindexter, born in Tennessee.

To summarize, we have found a Southerner emigrating North and getting himself

elected President from a Northern State; we have a Secretary of the Treasury and an Attorney-General, both born in the South, and both appointed to the Cabinet from Northern States; we have twelve Senators who were born in the South but represent Northern or Western States.

Against that showing for the South, we have found just one solitary Senator who, though born in the North, broke into the Senate from a State that can be classed as Southern.

THE SOUTH IN THE HOUSE

The same investigation carried through the membership of the House of Representatives points the same general conclusion.

It is worth while to keep in mind that while the South holds such an unwonted proportion of the high places in the government, it does not control the Democratic caucus in the House of Representatives. Solid as is the solid South to-day, there are more Democratic Representatives from the Northern and Western States than from the South.

This is one of the startling facts which developed as a result of the landslide last November. It had been regarded as almost impossible for the Democrats to control the House without themselves being controlled by their Southern wing; but as matters turned out, the South is left in a distinct minority in the Democratic caucus. Strong Democratic delegations from States like Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois explain this remarkable condition.

On the other hand, the South, plus the border States, numbers sixteen States, with thirty-two Senators. Of these, three are Republicans—one each from Maryland, West Virginia, and Kentucky; leaving twenty-nine Southern Democratic Senators. There are fifty-two Democrats in the Senate, therefore the South has a clear majority of the Democratic caucus. The Republicans in the Senate number forty-three, and one, Poindexter, of Washington, classes himself a Progressive.

The real, final test, however, is the one that cannot be deduced from any mathematical analysis. It is the spirit and disposition, the purpose and inspiration, the tendency and direction which we note in the guiding forces of affairs. All these point unerringly to the South. In Washington you feel it in the air, you note it in

the changed and changing ways of business; you listen to evidence of it in the mellow accent with which the South makes our English a musical tongue; you hear strange names of men to whom leadership and importance are attributed; and if you ask, you almost invariably learn that they are from the South.

It is "the gentleman from Alabama" who makes the daily motion to adjourn the House; that motion being the special mark and prerogative of leadership. In the other chamber it is "the gentleman from Virginia." New England, thanks to its wisdom in raising veterans of the national service, only yesterday furnished navigators and helmsmen for the ship of state; but to-day it is the South to which we turn attentive ear for the word that indicates the national program.

What does it all mean for us—for this great nation?

THE RECONSTRUCTION ERA ENDED

The first and most important meaning, perhaps, is that *the period of reconstruction is ended*. The South, truly, has come back to its own. Half a century ago, beaten, bleeding, prostrate, it was held by sheer force in the bonds of a Union it had been determined to leave. To-day it has come back to rule that Union; it is the sovereign of a country which counts more than three times the population of the nation it sought to sunder.

It is a spectacle for the American imagination to contemplate and conjure with. Barely a generation has passed since the garrisons of national troops were taken out of the conquered South. In that generation we have seen the South restore its institutions, rebuild its cities, pay its debts, develop a wealth and prosperity whose like it had not dreamed before; and now at length it resumes its leadership of the nation. Where else in the world, past or present, can such a peaceful revolution be paralleled?

It is no adventitious, accidental circumstance that has brought the South back to primacy. The country has done this thing because the times were ripe and the nation ready. Not only has a Southern man been elected President, with Southern sympathies, sentiments, affiliations. That might have happened more or less accidentally, as politics goes nowadays. But let it be remembered that in the convention that

nominated Mr. Wilson there were just three candidates of serious significance, and every one of them was from the South.

With a fine crash, the old superstition that the South mustn't expect the Presidency went to smash forever. Too long had the South stood modestly back and allowed the Northern Democracy to name the ticket, write the platform, engineer the campaign. The accepted theory of that elder political day was that the South could do the nominating for the Republican machine, the electing for the Democratic, and the rest of the time hold its peace.

Well, that day is ended. The South hereafter will be a part of these United States, precisely as any other section will. Whatever of prejudice and misunderstanding may have survived thus long after the old conflict of sections must be laid away.

The South is back at the wheel, and if events shall prove that it has laid the right course for the ship, then it is likely to remain in control of the old craft for a right smart spell.

In any case, whether the present administration fails or succeeds, it will do so on policies and results, not on prejudices and superstitions. Hark back to the campaign of last autumn, and try to recall whether you heard anybody, or read of anybody, arguing that the Democratic party must be defeated because it would be dangerous to return the South to power. There may be the most sincere doubts as to the practicability of Southern *policies*, but nobody thinks nowadays of questioning the South's *patriotism*, its loyalty, its devotion to the ideal of an indissoluble Union.

What has been said about certain superficial aspects suggestive of sectionalism might be subject to misconstruction unless the other side of the shield is also exhibited. Mr. Wilson is the first Southern President since the Civil War, it is true; but also he may fairly be said to be the first national, non-sectional President in that time. He is both Northerner and Southerner. He was elected by North and South together.

Mr. Wilson would have been elected President without counting a single vote in any one of the eleven States that seceded from the Union. He needed two hundred and sixty-six electoral votes to win; he would have had three hundred and nine without counting one from any State that

joined the Confederacy. Indeed, if we go still farther, and deny him also the electoral votes of the three border States of Maryland, Kentucky, and Missouri, he would still have had enough to elect, and four to spare.

FEW VETERAN SOLDIERS IN CONGRESS

There is another calculation which shows in a striking way how far we have advanced into a new political era, marked by an absence of the old sectionalism, if not by the development of a new nationalism. In the Congress which is sitting at the time when this article is written, there are ninety-six members of the Senate and four hundred and thirty-five of the House. Of these, there are, according to the "Congressional Directory" for April, 1913, the latest issued, just seven members who were Federal soldiers in the Civil War, and ten who were Confederate soldiers.

Compare these figures with those from the "Directory" for May, 1910, and we find that in that compilation twenty-nine members mentioned that they had been soldiers of the Federal army, while nineteen mentioned service on the other side. In three years the number of Union veterans has dropped from twenty-nine to seven; of Confederates, from nineteen to ten.

This means more than might be assumed at first glance. The political casualty list for the Union veterans who were in Congress three years ago makes clear that most of them went down to defeat in the land-slides to Democracy of 1910 and 1912. Some were defeated for renomination in the primaries of their own party; some went down before Democratic candidates in the general election. At any rate, there are now more soldiers of the Confederacy than of the Union in Congress.

The day is close at hand, of course, when we shall point from the gallery to the figure of the last surviving Civil War veteran in Congress. Indeed, the day of sending the veterans to the national legislature is already past. A few men who have held seats for many years will remain till the last sound of "taps"; but on the entire Republican side of the present House I find only one veteran newly elected to that body since 1910—Sanford Kirkpatrick, of the sixth Iowa district.

The Civil War veterans now in Congress, according to the latest "Congressional Directory," are:

Confederates—Senators John H. Bankhead and Joseph F. Johnston, Alabama; A. O. Bacon, Georgia; John R. Thornton, Louisiana; Thomas S. Martin, Virginia. Representatives George W. Taylor, William Richardson, Alabama; Albert Estopinal, Louisiana; J. F. C. Talbott, Maryland; Charles Manly Stedman, North Carolina—ten in all.

Federals—Senators John D. Works, California; Henry A. du Pont, Delaware; Knute Nelson, Minnesota; Nathan Goff, West Virginia; Francis E. Warren, Wyoming. Representatives Sanford Kirkpatrick, Iowa; Isaac R. Sherwood, Ohio—seven in all.

The list does not pretend to absolute accuracy; some of the members may have omitted mention of their war service. Nelson W. Aldrich, when he was boss of the Senate, never printed in his official biography the fact that he had a record of highly creditable service in the Civil War. But such cases are rare enough not to mar greatly the accuracy of computations.

No significance attaches, of course, to the comparative numbers of Union and Confederate soldiers serving in Congress. The details have been given merely because they suggest so strikingly the extent to which the nation has passed beyond the time when either the men, the measures, or the sentiments of the Civil War era weigh mightily in public councils.

A NEW ERA IN OUR POLITICS

The best possible proof of the completion of reconstruction is in the fact that the South has been able to come back to control *through Northern votes*. That is the big, outstanding fact; the North called the South back to national leadership—called it back, not because it was the South, but because the time had come when, being an integral part of the nation, just as confidently accepted and as fully trusted as any other section, it was considered to represent the program to which the country desired to commit itself.

In this view, it is not necessary to indulge any rhapsodies about the breadth and generosity of Northern vision as indicated by this recall of the South. For forty years the South has been voting for Northern control; giving its electoral support to Northern Democrats, and never presuming to demand the Presidency in its own right. It does not seem such a remarkable in-

stance of self-abnegation, therefore, that the North should at length have given its suffrage to a party and a program that represented the blood and the ideals of the South, as well as its traditional policies on public questions.

These are a few of the facts which demonstrate the full force and meaning of the observation that we are entered upon a new national era. There will be no returning to the old divisions, prejudices, and suspicions. That is as plain as any fact of history can ever be without the perspective view of time's long vista. A generation hence we shall look back to 1912 and recognize it, far more clearly than is now possible, as the year which truly marked the close of the era of reconstruction.

It is easier to-day to express confidence that we are leaving a very distinctly marked era than to forecast that upon which we are at the same time entering. There are those, indeed, who will assert that the election of 1912 was not really epochal and determinative, because its result was achieved through the division of a party which, in its two segments, counted a clear majority of the country's total poll; but that, in the light of political experience, has little to do with the case.

Assuredly the election of 1860 was the beginning of an era; yet Mr. Lincoln was elected through a split in the Democratic party, precisely similar to that of 1912 in the Republican party. He was not the choice of a national majority for President; yet he became President, and he brought his party into power with such a sweep that in the succeeding fifty-two years it was dominant all but eight.

It is not likely that we shall have such long leases of political power in favor of any party in future; quite unlikely that we shall have them in any future that we may now safely forecast. A time of loose partisan ties is upon us. Names and insignia and traditions mean less to the average American than ever before. Party loyalty sits lightly on the mind and conscience of the voter. At the ballot-box he is looking for a chance to express most accurately the opinions he entertains, to serve the interest he conceives most important to him.

Even the hold of patronage on the organization man's loyalty is broken; civil-service laws, and, still more important, a public sentiment which enthusiastically acquiesces in their purpose, have dulled

the weapon of the machine. Primary laws, limitations upon the raising and the use of campaign funds, are all reenforcing the national fight against partizanship. It is going to be easier and easier in future for the United States to change its political mind—and its political masters.

NATIONAL PROBLEMS OF TO-DAY

In this era of milder partizan and deeper social feeling, the nation will attack its great national problems in a truly national way. Just as the North has come to understand better the peculiar problems of the South, and to sympathize with the South in her dealings with them, so the South has been brought to appreciate her great part in handling questions that are broader than her local horizon.

The new South is really come back into a complete partnership of opportunity and responsibility in the national family. Her problems are no longer the problems of day-by-day, hand-to-mouth struggling to wrest an existence from the chaos of a wrecked industrial system and a ruined social order. Rather, the South's problems are precisely those of the rest of the country—the problems that arise from necessity to organize and control abounding social and industrial forces, to insure to every man as nearly as possible a fair interest in the product of those forces.

If the South has her peculiar problem of the races, the North has hers of receiving and assimilating the vast and variegated tide of immigration that comes mainly to Northern shores. They are different problems, yet not without intimate relationship.

It is good for the South, and for the North and West as well, that the South must face the big responsibilities of leadership. This is not to suggest a conclusion as to the wisdom or unwisdom of the particular views of government which the South may be supposed to entertain. The South may have the best or the worst tariff views, currency views, trust views; it may have tended to grow provincial in its attitudes on public questions during the years of its confinement to administration of local affairs. There are people who believe that is the case, a good many Democrats among them. If that be true—if a certain measure of exclusion from national activities has narrowed its vision—then the best possible way to widen that vision is to lift it up to the dominating heights of

national control and let it learn by experience. For learning how to do things, there is no training equal to that of doing them. The South now has them to do.

A democracy cannot be a democracy at all if a large section of the community is shut out from participation in all the tasks which democracy imposes. Before the Civil War the South was the dominating section; but it was a provincial South, by reason of its paramount concern to protect its peculiar industrial and social system. It was defeated, weakened, and impoverished in the struggle that overthrew the old system; and after that struggle it was for a long time excluded from full participation in government. But at length it is reestablished on an American basis, and is come back into its old dominance, freed from the burden of a special, local institution which warped its interests and distorted its vision.

Of the South's genius for the business of government, testimonial is found in the careers of its sons all the way from Washington to Wilson; from the Virginia burgesses to the commission government of Galveston. But, however we may honor the sons of the South who played their magnificent part in the founding and the establishment of this nation, yet it seems not unfair to say that never until this year of grace 1913 has a truly democratic South had the opportunity to contribute its fullest share to the making and management of a truly democratic country.

We have come a long way, and by a devious road, to reach at this late day the ideal of a really united country—united in social, economic, and political purpose. For the first time sectionalism is completely subordinated.

That the old diversities of interest and prejudice have been outlived, while we have been able to keep this a united country, is to be set down as one of the marvels of human experience. Who could look back over a history that embraces the colonial era, the Revolution, the establishment of the Constitution with its compromise on slavery, the nullification episode, the Civil War, the long succeeding period of sectional feeling, and not realize this?

Never in all that period of growth and development has there been a time when the nation was so knitted together with a uniformity of purpose in behalf of common humanity as it is to-day.

THE RIVALRY OF EAST AND WEST

BY J. INGRAM BRYAN, M.A., Ph.D.

PROFESSOR IN THE IMPERIAL NAVAL COLLEGE OF JAPAN AND THE MEIJI UNIVERSITY

IT is fast coming to be understood by the nations of the world that racial rivalry is to be the crucial international problem of the future, if it is not already sufficiently pressing to demand solution. The prospects at present are that the contest will be between the East and the West, between the so-called yellow races and the white.

For centuries unnumbered the Far East was a thing apart and lived unto itself. Like all things that live unto themselves, it might have died a natural death; but the restless West broke in upon its seclusion and demanded freedom of international intercourse. The Oriental nations, though loath to be disturbed in their stagnation, were obliged to acquiesce in agreements providing for diplomatic intercourse and trade.

Then it was that the East began to awake to the danger of being swallowed up by Western nations unless it secured the naval and military armaments in which they trusted, and which apparently gave the West its main prestige and power. Japan was the first to realize this; and China is now beginning to follow suit.

It was, of course, impossible for the West to invade the East without suffering invasion in turn; and ever-increasing numbers of Orientals have been pouring into the more sparsely occupied territories of the West. At first they did not go without invitation; for, as a matter of fact, they were wanted as hewers of wood and drawers of water in Western lands. The lords of the West came to the East for purposes of gain; but when they saw that the Oriental emigrant was impelled by the same motive, and that he was capable of something better than menial service, they became alarmed and would have no more of him.

At the outset, terms between East and West were to be reciprocal; each was to enjoy equal privilege in the land of the other, and to be free to come and go at pleasure. Now the lords of the West wish to stop the coming of the Oriental, while reserving themselves the right to come East when and as they please. To this unequal treatment the East strongly and even indignantly objects; but the West is equally unyielding.

The West is to-day arrayed against the East, not because of the alleged inferiority of Oriental civilization, as some fain would imagine, but because the man from Asia has proved himself able to outdo the man from the West on his own ground. In other words, the Oriental is resented, not because of his inferiority, but because of his superiority.

Now the reason of this admitted superiority of the East to the West in certain significant respects is worthy of the world's most serious consideration. The East expects to win; and many there are who believe it will win. Let us ask, therefore, how it expects to do so.

THE SECRET OF SURVIVAL

As a rule, the secret of survival in this world is simply the capacity to adapt oneself to environment and to be able to endure the worst. The Oriental is a man who has learned the utmost limit of endurance; he has, in fact, endured to the end, and will be saved. The West has never known the suffering that for ages has trained and tried the East.

The swarming humanity that peoples the Orient to-day is but a remnant—the remnant fittest to survive—of greater millions swept away by the numberless calamities of the past, by the sea of pain and sorrow surging over the East through immemorial

time. Out of oceans of anguish they have come in triumph, having defied plague, pestilence, and famine; battle, murder, and sudden death; heat, cold, and savage decimation; and to-day the Oriental stands as a monument of endurance beyond any mortal known to man. The man of the East has proved his capacity to adapt himself to all circumstances and, therefore, his fitness to live. He can underlive, and therefore he can outlive, any Occidental.

This inherent ability of the man from Asia is in itself sufficient to preclude the domination of the world by Western races, and to lead some to ask whether the future does not belong to the East.

It is the conviction of those foreigners resident in the East who have learned to comprehend somewhat the depth and force of its tides of life, as well as its immeasurable capacities for assimilation and adaptation, that the East has a far greater future than the West can at present possibly conceive. The West has indeed created a wondrous civilization, which has encircled the earth with its arts and sciences both of construction and destruction; but the East has the ability to take all these advantages to itself and make them still more mighty under the invulnerable impulse of the Oriental soul.

The more complex and delicate a civilization is, the more is it susceptible to fatal ills. So weak is Western civilization in this respect that it is already suffering from nervous shock after its slight impact with the unchanging East. Moreover, Western civilization is evolving millions into conditions impossible to maintain. Greater and greater numbers of people are becoming dependent upon others.

The vital question is not whether one race is superior to another, but whether it is equally able to survive. In this simple power of living the so-called higher races are far inferior to the races of the Far East. Though in physical energy and intellectual resource the Occidental excels the Oriental, he cannot keep himself up except at an expense wholly incommensurate with racial advantage. The Oriental can do all that the Occidental can do in the same time and by the same means, but with far less expense. The Occidental cannot live save at a cost sufficient for the maintenance of twenty Oriental lives.

Many of the larger animals of the earth have become extinct on account of the cost-

liness of their upkeep; and for the same reason the so-called superior races may perish unless they learn greater frugality. In the same manner, too, whole races of men have passed away unregretted by those who have overlived them and inherited all that was worth preserving in their arts and civilization. The modern West is forgetting the lesson of old Greece and Rome in relation to the less intellectual but sturdier races that finally enveloped them.

Nations may grow old and die, as men do; but society itself never dies. The essence of society is a spiritual quality, a sanity and vigor of soul, with a capacity to overcome environment; and the nation that most faithfully represents this quality holds the future in its hands. Where there is a lowering of the moral spirit and a slackening of the will, there is a severing of the bonds that bind society together, and the race is in danger.

Japan and China have not as yet come unto their full spiritual efflorescence, while the West seems to be passing the zenith and beginning to slacken. While there is life there is hope, however, and if the West can maintain a spiritual activity commensurate with the coming vigor of the awakening East, the leadership may remain with the West. To be within hope of such achievement, however, the West will have to change some of its ideas and methods.

"RACE SUICIDE" IN THE WEST

If fecundity be a sign of national and racial permanence and virility, then even now the odds are in favor of the East. In nearly all Occidental countries to-day the birth-rate appears to be steadily on the decline, while among the races of the East the tide is the other way.

No country can be great or do great things without population. Even wealth and physical constitution are less important factors in deciding a nation's future. The nations of antiquity failed and passed away, not through intellectual deficiency, but largely through want of numerical strength. Two hundred years ago France was the most populous, and consequently the most prosperous, country in Europe; but her birth-rate began to decline, and now she is surpassed both in population and importance by Russia, Germany, and Great Britain. In spite of great wealth, keen intellect, and high civilization, a race is ultimately dependent upon population for

strength and position among the world powers.

Now this canker that has sterilized the motherhood of France is already eating at the heart of Western Christendom, and the future of the so-called white races is threatened. On every side is heard complaint of an increasing tendency to shirk the duty of parental responsibility, especially the duty of motherhood.

The white woman has never suffered as the yellow woman has; she can never reach the same limit of endurance. Once she had this power, but she has lost it. Her greater ease and comforts have but given her a desire for more luxury and less responsibility; so that now she is losing the courage necessary to the bearing of offspring. Childlessness and sterility, together with the social evil, are as a dry-rot in the heart of Occidental society.

The increasing population of the United States and Canada is not due to births, but to immigration; and even the immigrants after a generation or so lose the capacity for multiplication. In Australia and other colonial lands is seen the same insidious tendency to racial suicide. And thus we are face to face with the anomalous circumstance of half-peopled lands with decreasing birth-rate refusing space for habitation to the fertile tribes of Asia, who are willing to multiply and replenish the earth, as the Creator appointed. This sin of the fathers will be visited on the children.

Japan's best hope lies in the fact that as yet she shows no sign of contracting the Occidental habit of artificial sterility; and so long as she remains immune to this form of suicide, her future is sure. Japan is not free from social vices, however; she has yet much to do morally before she is out of danger; but in the contest for permanency she stands a good chance of out-running the race-prejudiced West.

THE EXPANSION OF JAPAN

Owing to repeated pestilence and famine through ages past, the population of the East never gained natural headway, and did not increase to any great extent. But since Japan's adoption of Western methods of fighting disease, she is fast outstripping her teachers; and to-day she has from births alone a population increasing at the rate of more than half a million a year.

Owing to her large annual increase of population Japan is now face to face with

the problem of finding an outlet for her surplus; and this she must do either by emigration or by extension of territory. It is probable that she will turn in the direction of least resistance; but what that direction is, who can say? Emigration to lands that might ultimately become a part of the empire would be natural; but in what direction such hopes lie is still more of a mystery.

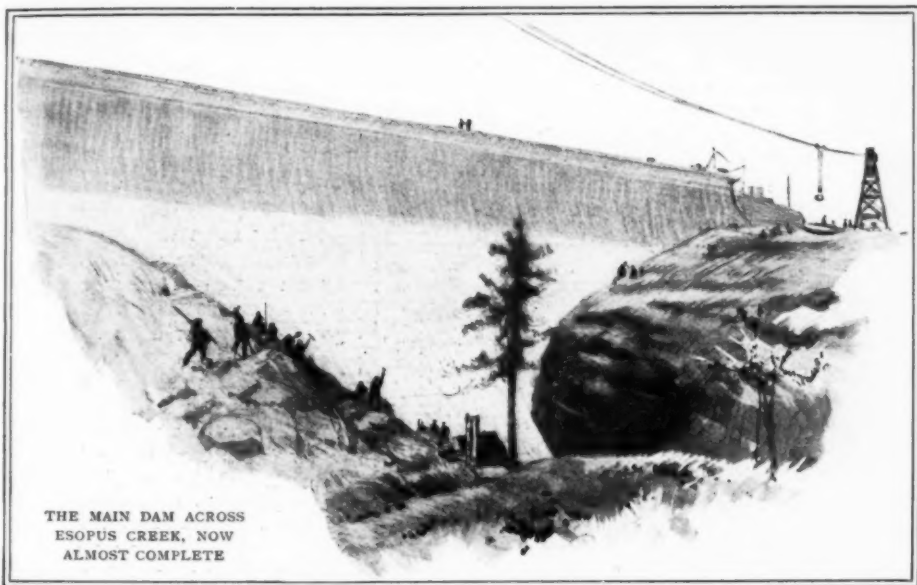
It is safe to say that Japan's chief hope at present lies in an extension of her empire in a friendly way—that is, by purchasing land for her emigrants. Already she has flourishing colonies in various parts of China, in Hawaii, and along the Pacific coast of North America. In the United States and Canada, however, as well as in Australia, a spirit of exclusion prevails; and the tide is now turning in favor of South America, where large numbers of Japanese immigrants are annually pouring into Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Peru. In so sparsely settled a country as South America the possibilities of territorial extension by purchase are almost unlimited. Moreover, in that happy land there is as yet no sign of color prejudice.

Including Korea, the population of the Japanese empire is now something more than sixty-five million souls, or more than three hundred to the square mile. The United States has a population of about one hundred millions, or less than thirty to the square mile. It could easily support fifteen times that number.

If Japan is forced to choose between congestion and forcible expansion, she will have little hesitation in deciding. If the people of the earth are but willing to live and let live, there is plenty of room for all. But if greedy and selfish races are going to treasure up vast unoccupied holdings for a posterity yet unborn, and with little or no prospect of being born, then there is going to be trouble.

Injustice is ever the mother of strife; and even now things have gone so far that to preclude a struggle great sacrifices will be necessary. But the sooner the change of attitude, the less will be the sacrifice; for to obey is better than sacrifice, and to harken, than the fat of rams.

The strife between the East and the West need not necessarily be a clash of armies and ironclads. Underneath are the everlasting arms. It will be simply a case of the survival of the fittest.



THE GREAT CATSKILL AQUEDUCT

NEW YORK'S NEW WATER-SUPPLY—A TREMENDOUS ENGINEER-
ING WORK NOW NEARING COMPLETION

BY EDWARD HUNGERFORD

ILLUSTRATED BY GORDON GRANT

THE metropolitan city of New York grows like a child in his teens.

Each twelvemonth sees its population increased by an Albany, a New Haven, or a Grand Rapids. At the end of five years it has added to itself the population of a Boston, a Cleveland, or a Baltimore.

And so its problems, the problems that come to every great city growing apace from out of its swaddling-clothes, are master problems. More than five million mouths to feed, more than five million tired folk to be transported, the whole cityful to be protected against fire and crime and

disease—no wonder that New York's problems of transportation, of police and fire protection, of public health with sanitation and pure water, are puzzling. Of all these, not the least is that of her water-supply.

At the present time, New York is reaching farther back into the green hills to find pure water for her thirsty millions. She is almost ready to bring it from the Catskill Mountains, a hundred miles up the valley of the Hudson.

The engineers and the contractors are at the beginning of the end of their task. They are beginning to dismantle the construction

machinery and making the final tests before the city's thirst shall be assuaged. And America has added to her list of achievements another great engineering triumph.

The incoming of more than one hundred and thirty thousand human beings each year, the undoubted fact that we are becoming a more cleanly people, as is shown by the increasing ratio of baths to popula-

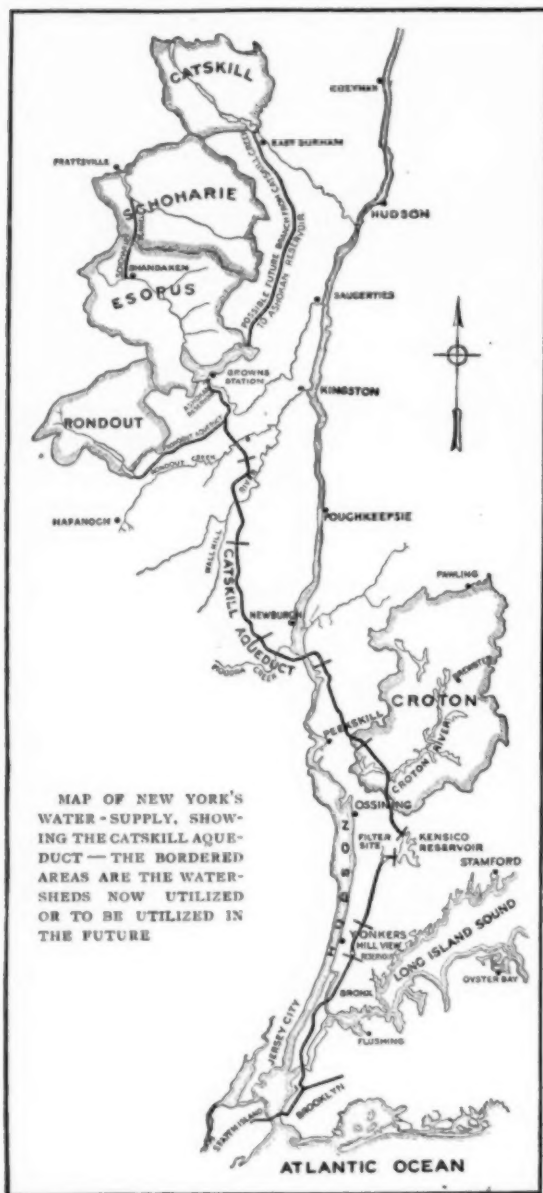
tion, made it evident more than a decade ago that the water-supply of New York would have to be enlarged—and soon. Older New Yorkers did not understand at once. It seemed to them but yesterday when the first Croton aqueduct, with its wonderful High Bridge over the Harlem River, was completed, to become the admiration of all the land. It was only a real yesterday when the original duct was much more than duplicated by an aqueduct capable of delivering three hundred million gallons of water a day.

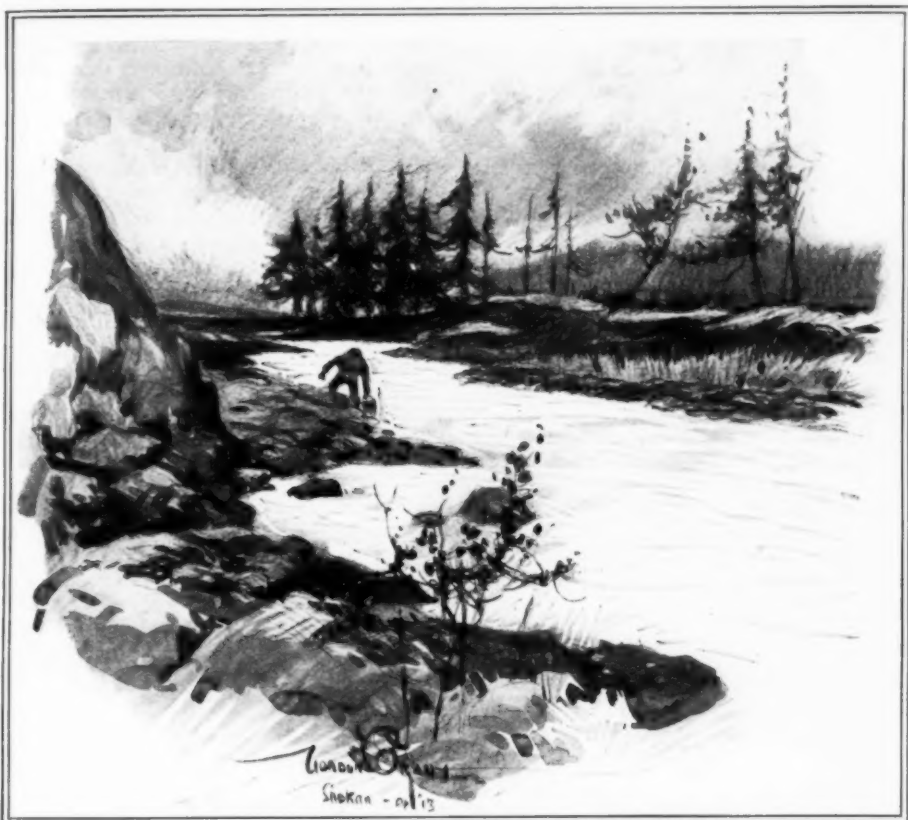
You could not make your older New Yorkers believe that the Croton supply would not meet the demand for many years to come. They did not see the solid rows of apartment-houses rising street upon street in upper Manhattan and the Bronx, whole miles of little houses multiplying in Brooklyn and in Queens Borough. Brooklyn, with close to a million and a half of population, had become part of New York, part of her problem.

Brooklyn, drawing a supply of wonderfully sweet and pure water from the streams and springs of Long Island, and from a host of artesian wells, was also perplexed by her growth. She found her own water-supply growing inadequate. There came a day, in the dry summer of 1900, when her chief reservoir held in the bottom of its bowl less than eight hours' supply for the city. The disaster that would have come upon Brooklyn if the tireless pumps had given way during those eight hours is not easy to contemplate.

THE BOARD OF WATER SUPPLY

There were men in New York who looked ahead, and who bent their minds toward solving this master problem. The work was educational, and it was tedious, but the steady pressure of insistence had its effect. In 1905 the Legislature created a bipartisan body to take the matter in hand. From lists suggested by several civic organizations, three men—





ESOPUS CREEK, THE CHIEF SOURCE OF SUPPLY FOR THE GREAT ASHOKAN RESERVOIR

J. Edward Simmons, Charles N. Chadwick, and Charles A. Shaw—were selected. These men brought to their task a high conception of their duty as well as keen and practical executive ability. That has been evidenced in the success of the enterprise.

Mr. Chadwick has remained upon the board since its creation, and to him is due not a small part of the credit for what it has achieved. There is another man who should be mentioned with him—J. Waldo Smith, the chief engineer. Mr. Smith was brought into the work late in July, 1905. He was asked a single question.

"Can you have a map, a plan, and an estimate ready for the board of estimate"—New York's real governing body—"by the first week in October?"

Of course the commissioners did not really expect anything of the sort. It was absurd to ask any engineer to survey and plat a mountainous area of nine hundred square miles, and to make a definite plan

for a water-works upon it, within sixty or seventy days. The commissioners merely wanted Mr. Smith to tell them how much time he would need—six or eight months perhaps. But they got a brief and unexpected answer.

"I can and I will," said Mr. Smith.

And it is worthy of record that the complete plan of the work was ready by the first week in October—the plan which, with slight variations, has been faithfully followed in the development of the work.

Just what toil that meant only Mr. Smith and the men who worked close beside him know. It is worthy of notice, however, that in order to locate an aqueduct ninety-two miles in length for the greatest efficiency and economy, the field men surveyed more than three thousand miles of line. That considerable task was only a portion of the sixty-day problem.

The commissioners had told Mr. Smith the direction in which he must go to find

the water. There was only one direction that was practicable. The Croton watershed, the traditional drinking-place of Father Knickerbocker, could meet no further demands. By impounding its tributary watersheds, it has been brought to a delivery point of five hundred million gallons a day; but within a comparatively few years New York would want twice that quantity.

The location of New York at the sharp apex of the great State to which it gives its name, and the fact that to go into other States for a water-supply would involve legal complications well-nigh insuperable, brought down the possibilities to a small radius. The watersheds of the Housatonic and the Ten Mile rivers are adjacent to the Croton, and their use would have simplified the problem of transporting the water; but the State of Connecticut had its rights in these streams. Similar considerations barred out the Delaware.

For a brief time the Hudson was considered—even if it should be found necessary to purchase and impound Adirondack streams to maintain the even flow of the river. But to use the Hudson meant the establishment and maintenance of huge filtration plants above salt water.

In his extremity, Father Knickerbocker turned toward the Catskills—famed in his romantic lore—and his problem was solved. A mountain area of something like a thousand square miles, sparsely settled, well wooded, abundant in rainfall—that was the place where nature offered water for the growing thirst of the great metropolis. After studying the rainfall reports of the region, and the flow of its many streams, the engineers said that the city might eventually count on three-quarters of a million gallons a day from the Catskills, even in a succession of dry years. That, together with the present water-supply, would be sufficient for at least ten million humans.

So the problem became one of carrying half a million gallons daily—the amount with which the new supply will start—from the foot-hills of the Catskills to New York, nearly a hundred miles away.

A NINETY-TWO-MILE AQUEDUCT

Imperial Rome builded aqueducts, and famous aqueducts they were, too; but imperial Rome never had ten million citizens to supply. Imperial Rome in three centuries builded aqueducts from twenty-five to fifty

miles in length that were the wonder of the civilized world for two thousand years. Imperial New York in a decade has builded an aqueduct ninety-two miles in length and far larger than anything that Rome ever dreamed of.

Fancy yourself in some high-hung aeroplane, looking down on the lower valley of the Hudson. That silvery lake at the foot of the mountains is the beginning of the aqueduct—the great Ashokan reservoir, created by man and his machines in eight years of steady work. For remember that there must be a reservoir of some sort at the beginning of every great aqueduct. The requirements of the city show comparatively little fluctuation throughout the year; but the water that supplies them comes from mountain streams that run as raging torrents in the spring, and in late summer show their rocky beds almost dry. To equalize such supply and demand into a steady flow of water at all seasons of the year is the work of this first great reservoir—to which we shall return in a moment.

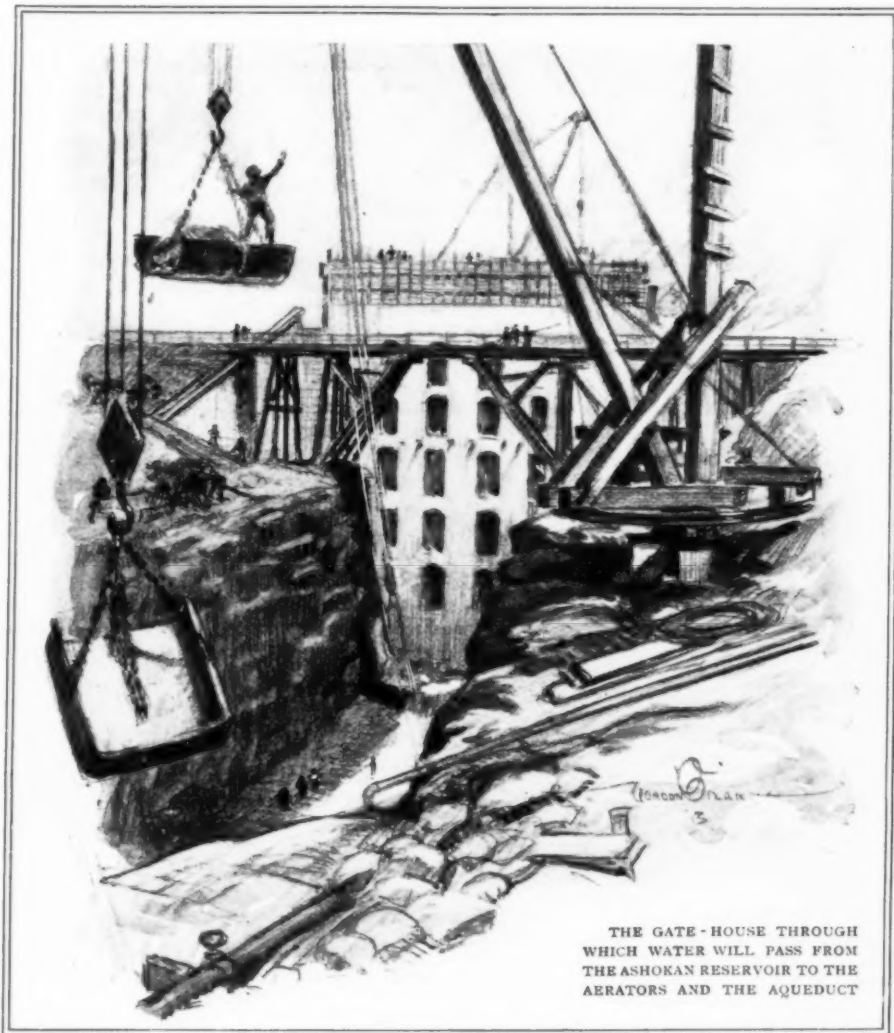
Now let your eye follow the thin trail that marks the line of the aqueduct, piercing down under hills, passing the range of the Shawangunks, and dipping under the valleys of the Rondout and the Wallkill—under the very beds of the streams that run through them.

Here is the Hudson, and the aqueduct does not hesitate even at that mighty channel. Where it narrows to make the passage of the Highlands, the man-made river dips sharply down into a great inverted siphon and bores beneath the Hudson's bed, more than a thousand feet below the surface of the water. When it comes up again it is upon the east bank, high above the river, and continuing its southward journey. From the valley of the Hudson it passes to that of the Croton, with its great artificial lakes from which Father Knickerbocker has been drinking these many years, and a little way below them the new Kensico reservoir.

The thirsty city must be guarded against the breaking of its aqueduct. Provisions must be made for emptying it at intervals of a few years, in order that it may be cleaned and kept in repair. The new Kensico reservoir meets this need. With a capacity of some forty billion gallons of water, it can meet the city's regular demand for Catskill water for almost three months, even if the aqueduct from the Ashokan should be closed.

Now let your eye travel south again—along the trail that marks the buried aqueduct, down toward where streets and houses begin to multiply; the long feelers by which a great city is steadily moving northward.

and hour out, there are fluctuations in demand—the day shows vastly greater call for water than the night—a supply must always be held close at hand and in abundant reserve against a great conflagration.



THE GATE-HOUSE THROUGH WHICH WATER WILL PASS FROM THE ASHOKAN RESERVOIR TO THE AERATORS AND THE AQUEDUCT

Here, at the crest of the high ridge over which busy Yonkers sprawls, and at the very edge of the city of New York, is still another reservoir, very much smaller than either the Ashokan or the Kensico, but still capable of holding nearly a billion gallons.

The function of this reservoir—they have named it Hillside—is to equalize the final flow of water into the city. Hour in

Here is the function of the Hillside reservoir, built in two huge bowls, and so designed that when the city shall have crept tightly up round about it, it can be covered, like some reservoirs in London.

MAKING CHANGES IN THE MAP

Before we examine more closely into the details of the aqueduct, and the ingenious

methods by which it distributes its water through the wide-spread city, turn your aeroplane north again and alight close to the edge of the Ashokan. If you have no aeroplane, you can take a train on the Ulster and Delaware Railroad, which runs inland from the old Hudson River town of Kingston. Or, again, you can drive up the famous old highway that runs from Kingston into the Catskills, and westward all the way to the Susquehanna valley, more than a hundred miles distant. This was locally known as the Stone Road, and was in form a crude sort of railroad. A double row of flagstones formed a track for the heavy wagons that brought the bluestone slabs from the Catskill quarries down to the Hudson.

Most of that old pavement has disappeared under the steady progress of the good-roads campaign of the State of New York. Much of the road itself will disappear under the waters of the new reservoir. Your driver makes that clear to you. You are driving through a considerable village, already partly abandoned. From the sign-board on its railway station you discover that you are in West Hurley.

"Two years more, and there'll be nearly a hundred feet of water above this street," says your driver.

His whip points to a distant wheat-field upon the ridge of hills that shelters the town—you can see a fresh earth-bank of a new railroad line at the base of the hills. It is a long distance away. The steam of a struggling locomotive seems like a tiny white feather.

"That's the new railroad," persists your driver. "They've just quit using the old. They've bought all this land, and this year they're beginning to tear out the little villages—Olive Bridge, Brodhead's, West Shokan—all of them. They're movin' out the houses a'ready. They're cuttin' down the trees and pilin' them up with the brush. This fall's a goin' to see the biggest conflagration that Ulster County's ever known."

You remember. One of the water-works engineers had already told you that two thousand people had to leave their homes, that seven villages were going to slip out of the map. It has come as a tragedy to these little Dutch towns.

A TEMPORARY TOWN

We come to Brown's Station. We are in time to find the workmen placing the last touches upon the dam and weirs, dikes and

gate-houses. The heaviest part of the construction work is finished, and they are beginning to dismantle the brisk little town that sprung up there, almost overnight. But if the camp city did spring up overnight, it was none the less carefully planned. The contractors who undertook the twelve-million-dollar job of building the Ashokan dam and reservoir realized that they would have to house more than three thousand workmen, many of them with their families, for eight or nine years. The horrors of other construction camps have often been told.

"We will build a different sort of a town at the Ashokan," said the New York engineers.

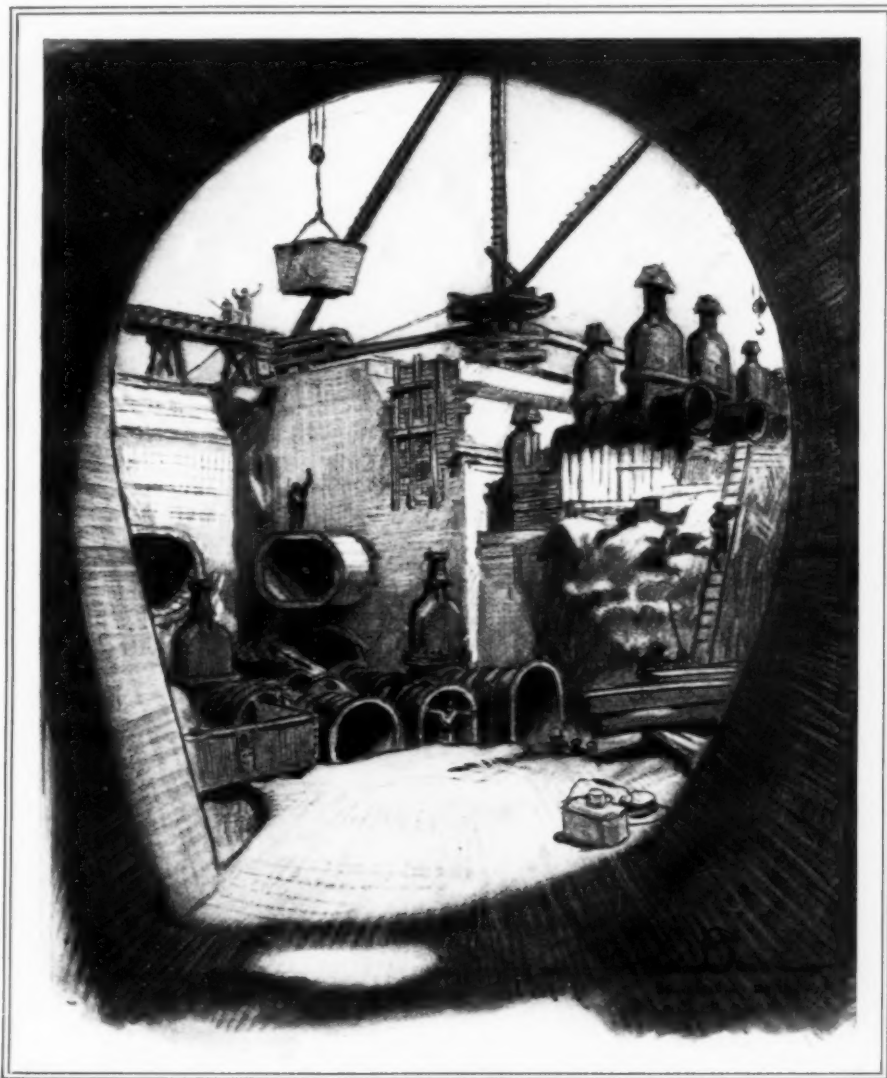
They chose a knoll at the very focal point of the new reservoir, convenient to the railroad, and there they built their community, with the help of expert town-planners. They built it for health and comfort and decency. Its houses were evenly placed upon well-made streets, electric lighting and running water and a sewage system appeared, almost before the bungalow huts themselves.

After the houses came all the appurtenances of a permanent town—two or three churches, a big school, stores, a national bank, a fire department, a comfortable club for engineers and contractors, and even an opera-house. None of these structures was better built than the emergency hospital, which stood ready for work at all hours during the prosecution of the job, but which, fortunately, has not been called upon to meet any very serious crisis. And it is worthy of note that there were no saloons at Brown's Station, or anywhere else upon the land which the city bought for the new water-works, although "speakeasies" and dance-halls that would have shamed a Western mining-town had a way of springing up at the very edge of the city's property.

It was partly because of the problem that these presented, as well as to protect both the construction work and the property of the people of the adjoining countryside, that New York created a special police force for the enterprise. A company of policemen, organized very much on the plan of the famous mounted police of the Canadian Northwest, was gathered, housed in barracks at various points along the ninety-two miles of aqueduct and reservoir, and placed on duty.

But the problem of the workmen—the immensely human problem, if you please—was not so much of correction as of interest and of education. The rigorous enforce-

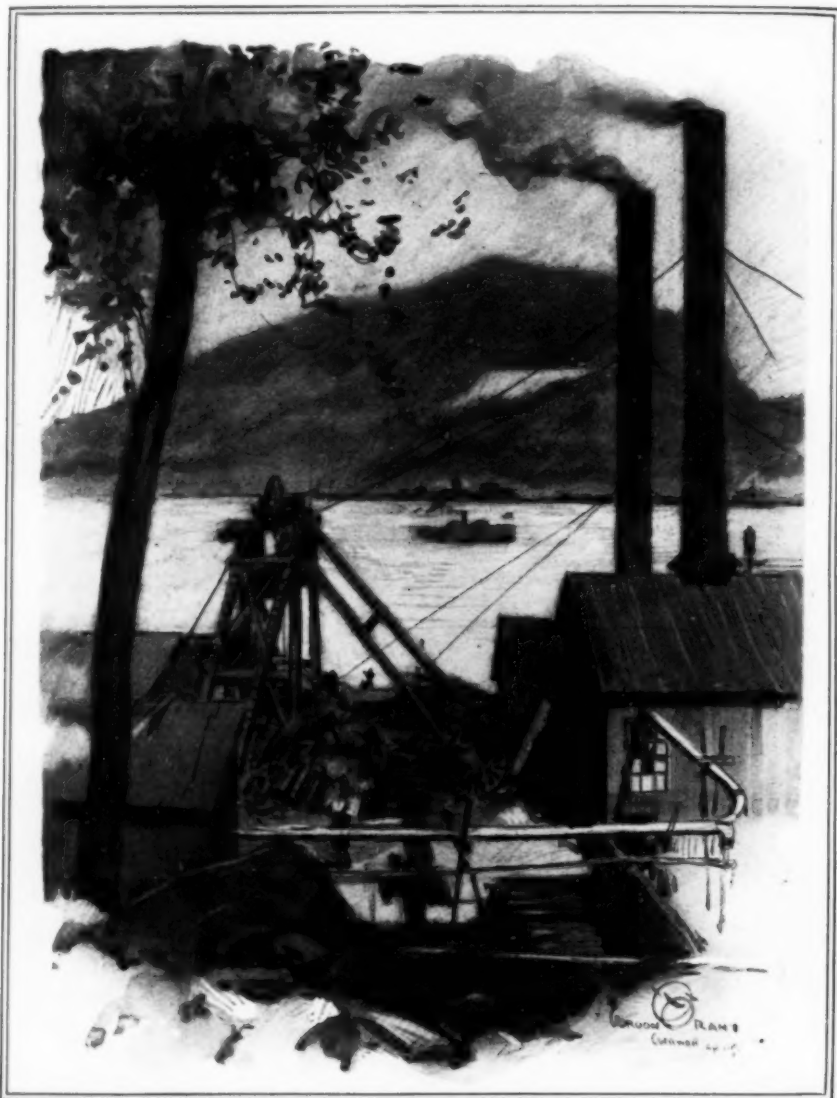
"Our by-product is men," says Commissioner Chadwick, in speaking of this very point. "I do not know a better by-product anywhere than raising the standard of



AT THE HEAD OF THE GREAT PIPE WHICH IS TO CARRY THE CATSKILL WATER TO NEW YORK—
NOTE THE IRREGULAR CURVE OF THE WALLS OF THE PIPE

ment of the eight-hour law, as applied to public works, made this last phase easy of solution. And it gave the board of water supply an opportunity to do something more than merely build the largest water-works ever constructed.

American citizenship. All along this work we have had schools in plenty—starting with a kindergarten for the youngest generation, and ending with the school for the grown men, our laborers. Eight hours for work—that by law—eight for play, eight



VIEW ACROSS THE HUDSON FROM THE SIDE OF STORM KING MOUNTAIN, AT THE POINT WHERE THE CATSKILL AQUEDUCT DIVES DEEP UNDER THE RIVER, TO REAPPEAR ON THE SIDE OF BREAKNECK MOUNTAIN, WHERE THE FRESH-CUT ROCK SHOWS WHITE IN THE ILLUSTRATION

for sleep. There's the regular schedule at Brown's Station. We have taught our men—most of them Italians—the English language, American history, and American government. We started by appealing to the Italian's pride by asking him who it was that discovered America. After that, the rest was easy enough."

The only permanent building of all these

at Brown's Station—pending the erection of the gate-house upon its foundations of solid concrete—is a stout triangulation tower that stands upon the very pinnacle of the knoll. To the top of that tower you will probably go when you wish to get your first general review of the whole reservoir site. From its parapet your guide—one of the many young engineers employed upon the

work—helps you to realize the immensity of the work.

THE GREAT ASHOKAN RESERVOIR

"Imagine this reservoir," he explains, "as two great saddle-bags of nearly equal size. The west saddle-bag—we call it a basin, of course—we have formed in the valley of the Esopus Creek, our chief source of water for the reservoir. The east basin we made from the valley of the Beaverkill, a small tributary. These valleys form natural walls for the greater part of the reservoir. Down there is the big dam that we thrust across the Esopus. That dam and a few dikes form all the barriers that we had to build."

"How big will the reservoir be?" you venture.

"How big?" he echoes. "Well, there is to be a brick-paved automobile drive around the edge, and it will be a little more than forty miles long. If you want the capacity of the reservoir, in rough figures it will hold one hundred and twenty-seven billion gallons."

One hundred and twenty-seven billion gallons! That rather staggered your imagination; but the young engineer comes to the rescue.

"Just imagine the whole of Manhattan Island covered with water to an even depth of twenty-eight feet," he says, "and you have the thing in mind."

From the top of the triangulation tower you saw the coping edge of the great dam. Now you find your way down to it. Squarely it fills the narrow, rocky gorge of the Esopus, as if man had forced a giant hand to block the progress of that brisk stream.

Climb to the top of the dam. Even that crest is twenty-eight feet broad—broad enough to carry a highway when the work is completed and the ambitious landscape gardening round about it done. At the stream, two hundred feet below, the structure is more than two hundred and forty feet thick. It is one of the giant pieces of masonry in the land.

"Masonry?" you inquire, and glance at the neatly dovetailed face.

That face is *not* masonry. It is built of concrete blocks, smoothly wrought in a shed near by; but the heart of the structure is masonry—giant blocks of hard granite laid in concrete. Your engineer calls it "cyclopean," and when your mind is again staggering with statistics—he is trying to tell

you of the cubic yards of material that went into the making of this dam and the outlying dikes of the Ashokan—he comes once more to your rescue.

"Old Cheops," he informs you, "was something of a builder. The great pyramid that he constructed back there in Egypt was seven hundred and fifty-five feet square at the base and four hundred and eighty-one feet high—quite a structure, even for these days. Yet the material that has gone into this dam and the dikes would make eight such pyramids, with quite a bit to spare."

Your young engineer takes you from the nearly completed dam down into the floor of the west basin of the reservoir.

"Our own Culebra Cut!" he tells you.

THE GATE-HOUSE AND THE AERATORS

Two or three steam-shovels are working in a giant trench some eighty feet deep, almost as wide, and approximately a mile in length. The engineer explains that it will serve as a flow channel to the gate-house, which stands upon the broad dividing weir between the two basins of the reservoir, at the very point where the aqueduct begins its long course.

Just at the present moment that gate-house is a rather inchoate thing. Its upstream face, with several tiers of window-like chambers showing in its concrete strength, looks like the creation of some Oriental architect; while down-stream, under its future walls, is a giant pit hewn from the solid rock, in which will be sunk the gates, the huge Venturi meters, which show almost to the fraction of a gallon the water that is being withdrawn from the reservoir, and the pipes that lead to the aerators.

These last will form one of the showy features of the completed reservoir. In a space roughly approximating the area of Madison or Union Square in New York, will be set some eighteen hundred fountain jets, which all the year, with the exception of the few sharpest months of winter, will play high into the air. You can talk about the *grandes eaux* of Versailles, which were built to meet the playful fancies of an extravagant king, and which are now shown only on gala days. They will pale before the blooming joy of King Water as he dances in his great park among the foothills of the Catskills before plunging down the long, dark pipe to the thirsty city.

But the water-works are nothing if not utilitarian, and the aerators are not built for any merely spectacular purpose. Despite the half-million dollars that has been spent in cleaning the floor of the reservoir before turning the water into the west basin this autumn, there will be some plant life in the bottom of the Ashokan. There is no danger in vegetable life on the floor of a reservoir; the worst that it can do is to impart a slightly bitter taste to the water. The aerating fountains will remove this. They will do something more, however. They will prevent the great pressure that comes upon the dams and the dikes exerting its bursting strength upon the aqueduct.

For remember that that great tube, built of concrete, smoothly molded on iron frames, stretching across the country for long miles, is not a pressure pipe. With the exception of its inverted siphons under the rivers, it will flow a little more than three-quarters filled. It will be quite possible for a man in a boat to ride upon its surface. Boat manholes inserted in its roof at frequent intervals make full allowance for this method of inspection.

Now leave the reservoir and give your attention to the aqueduct, as it shoots to the south from the mountains. It is a real river, which will flow at the rate of four or five miles an hour. It will take Father Knickerbocker's cool draft some three days and three nights to travel from its great cup in the hills to the most remote of his outlying residents. If you wish to get an idea of the size of the stream, you may remember that the cubic capacity of the aqueduct is sufficient, if the shaping and the grades were different, to permit two standard railroad tracks to be laid side by side for its entire length. And the water that is to flow through it, if poured into Broadway, would run waist-high in that busy street at about the rate at which a man walks.

THE TUNNEL UNDER THE HUDSON

For most of its course the hidden river will follow the surface of the ground, but here and there it will pierce the hills that nature placed squarely across its path, or will dip under the river valleys. The greatest of these last, of course, is the Hudson. That stubborn river has halted many an ambitious railroad project seeking to find a terminal in the metropolitan city of New York. It puzzled the aqueduct engineers, but it did not halt them.

They went to its narrowest point south of Albany—at Storm King Mountain, in the lovely Highlands—and decided that there their artificial river, traveling south almost as the crow flies, must make its crossing. For a time they considered swinging a giant bridge. There were many reasons, however, why that was impracticable. It was decided that the river must be tunneled.

A tunnel was no easy solution of the problem. Geologists said that the bed of the Hudson at that point was a gigantic V-shaped fissure, but that below that deep fissure was solid rock. They were right; but the engineers made sure. They started diamond drills from either bank of the river, boring diagonally down into the hard rock. There were other borings, conducted with no small difficulty from floats anchored in mid stream, but these were unsatisfactory. The shore-made borings of the diamond drills told the story.

Perhaps you are not familiar with the diamond drill—that hollow-centered, inquisitive fellow, whose rim is set with a cutting edge of hard and precious gems, and which, quickly revolving, not only bores deep into dirt and solid rock alike, but sends up a constant report of what it is finding. The "core" taken from the hollow center of the drill is its report of the buried strata of the earth.

The engineers at the Storm King borings took the core and laid it out on long tables. It was like a moving-picture film of the problem ahead of them, for it showed stratum below stratum, good rock and poor, the path that it had made for itself.

Some fifteen hundred feet below the surface of the river the paths of the inclined drills sent from each bank overlapped. In all that distance they had not emerged from hard rock. The geologists were right!

Then the drill-gangs took a fresh start and sent their drills into a more shallow V—its bottom less than a thousand feet below the surface. Again they found hard rock. It was certain that between these two lines of boring rested a hard material through which a pressure-resisting siphonic tunnel could be safely bored.

And so the contractors bored their tunnel, a little more than a thousand feet underneath the surface of the river and its traffic. It was not an easy job. There was one time when it seemed as if they had struck an underground lake of great dimensions, and it was necessary to rig a

great battery of pumps to draw off the water. But they stuck it out after the grim fashion of contractors, and to-day there is a broad, dry path under the Hudson, awaiting the coming of the Catskill water.

THE TUNNEL BENEATH THE CITY

The problem of carrying the aqueduct as a pressure tube underneath the Hudson was repeated when Father Knickerbocker came to the question of distributing the water in all the corners of his town. There were two more busy rivers—the Harlem and the East—to be crossed, the backbone of the busy island of Manhattan to be threaded. Here was a tunnel-building task which, had there been no great reservoirs or aqueduct to claim attention, would have been instantly recognized as a monumental engineering feat in itself.

When the earthquake shook San Francisco and, in the twinkling of an instant, snapped its water-mains asunder, fire completed the destruction. It was partly to avoid the remote possibility of such a disaster in New York, as well as to avoid even the deepest of underground railroad constructions, that the distributing tunnel has been carried at least two hundred feet below the level of the streets.

And so it was that numerous tunnel-digging plants have showed themselves upon the face of New York within the past year or more. There is a shaft-house in Bryant Park, one at the busy Broadway corner in Madison Square, a third in front of Peter Cooper's statue at the head of the Bowery, three or four in Central Park—twenty-one, all told, in the island of Manhattan, in addition to three in Brooklyn. From these awkward green structures—they look like mining-camps strung through the heart of the city—shafts have been sunk to the level of the tunnel, and headings are being driven in both directions. Work is progressing steadily, and the tunnel will be ready by the time both basins of the Ashokan reservoir have been filled.

"One thing more," you demand. "The cost?"

To the credit of the engineers and the members of the board of water supply, it can be said that they kept within the estimates prepared at the beginning. The figure originally named, exclusive of the problem of delivering the water under the five boroughs of New York, which was left for further study, was one hundred and sixty-one million dollars, of which more than eighteen millions has gone into the land and construction of the Ashokan reservoir, with close to ten millions for the Kensico reservoir. The distribution system under New York will cost an additional fifteen millions.

Great and costly as is the work now nearing completion, New York has only begun to tap the resources of the Catskills. The present reservoirs and aqueduct are built for bigger things than merely catching the water of the Esopus and the Beaverkill, a small river and a mere brook. When the city in its resistless growth shall demand more water, it can get it—from those same Catskills.

To the north of the Esopus watershed lies that of the Schoharie. When the time comes, the waters from the higher part of that valley can be emptied into the Esopus by means of a short tunnel through the mountains. East of the Schoharie lies the valley of Catskill Creek, also available by connecting aqueduct. To the south and west is the valley in which Rondout Creek rises. These four streams, taken together, could easily quench the thirst of ten million New Yorkers.

"And when we come to be fifteen millions?" asks the New Yorker.

"Beyond us lie the Adirondacks, beyond the Adirondacks the Great Lakes—the greatest fresh-water supply in all the world," they reply. "When the fifteen millions come we shall be ready."

And of such inspired dreamings is the profession of the engineer born.

SONG'S END

THINK not that song must end, and peace be all,
In the wide meadows of eternity;
The lyric brooks that heed the ocean's call
But join its vast, unending symphony!

Arthur Wallace Peach

EDITORIAL

THE GERMAN KAISER

THE war-lord of Europe has been celebrating the quarter-century of his reign, and it is the celebration of a quarter-century of peace.

The Kaiser has been as great in peace as Bismarck was in war. He took over the scepter from the hand of the Iron Chancellor, who had in reality wielded it before him, and the world trembled at the menace. It has done its full share of trembling ever since; but Wilhelm has made no wars. The peace of Europe has been in his hand more than in the hand of any other man, and he has preserved it.

He has unified Germany as Bismarck probably could not have done, for Bismarck was a Prussian imperialist, while Wilhelm has been merely an imperialist. He has brought his empire to recognition as the dominating power of the continent; has builded up its industries, its commerce, its intellectual fabric, its wealth, its population, its naval and military power. He has not made friends for his country; he has been too constantly aggressive, in too many directions, for that; but he has overawed those he could not charm.

Bismarck humbled Austria on the battle-field, but did not bring true the dream of Pan-Germanism. Wilhelm has made Austria his ally, and brought closer the realization of the ideal of all-German unification. He has invaded the Levant, and the shadow of his power lies across Europe from the North Sea to the Balkans. He has demanded a part in colonial enterprise when there seemed no fields to enter, and has secured it, albeit thus far the German genius for colonial development has but poorly demonstrated itself.

What a colonial Germany there might have been had the empire been able to keep under the German flag that fine community of Teutons who came to North America and contributed so much to making this country what it is! Looking to the part they played here, it is not safe to assume that somewhere else the Germans may not yet be the greatest colonizers of the world.

A CRUMBLIED MONUMENT

A TUMBLED and crumbled monument of the Civil War, with its inscription already well-nigh obliterated, is the fourteenth amendment to the Constitution, as expressed in the laws drafted to put it into effect. The amendment was intended to give protection to the colored race, which had just been freed from human slavery. In its actual application by statute it proves only a shield and buckler for corporations that seek to guard themselves from legislation which seems to them to contain the menace of confiscation.

The "civil rights" which Charles Sumner planned to secure to the negroes by his legislation of 1875 have become, in the analysis of fact, no more than the denial that a State can be allowed to deprive any person of life, liberty, or property without due process of law.

NOTE—All editorials in this department were written before the end of June.

The Federal act of 1875 first broke down in the endeavor to make it a criminal offense to discriminate against the negro in hotels, theaters, restaurants, and trains. The Supreme Court of the United States found that the amendment was directed only against State legislation, and carried no guarantee against the infringement of one citizen's rights by fellow citizens. By a recent decision, the court crushes whatever was left of the shell. It declares that the act of 1875 does not extend to the sea, or to the navigable waters of the States. The colored complainant who was making a journey from Boston to Norfolk, with a first-class ticket, is refused indemnification from the steamship company that directed her to eat at a second or separate table.

The ruling is precisely in consonance with the earlier ones. It simply repeats, in new form, that there are no guarantees of personal equality or liberty, outside of those established by the fourteenth amendment to forbid an abridgment of the privileges of citizenship by State laws. It sums up the failure of forty years to legislate "social equality."

The comparison in constitutional history that it sets up between the work of the fathers and that of the men of the Civil War, as judged by their ability to get the results at which they aimed, is most illuminating.

DRAWING A DISTINCTION

AN artisan living in a California town wrote to his Senator at Washington, offering to pay a thousand dollars if the statesman would get him appointed postmaster. The sum he named would have been just about a ten-per-cent "tip," on the basis of the salary of the office for a four-year term.

When the Federal officers came and arrested the letter-writer for offering a bribe, he was surprised and shocked. He had always been accustomed to paying tips to waiters, porters, cabmen, and like functionaries of semipublic character, and he supposed that a United States Senator was a public institution in much the same way. Moreover, he observed—he was a carpenter by trade—that it was very common in that trade for workmen to give the boss carpenter "two bits or four bits a day" for picking them for the job.

Ignorance of the law, of course, is no excuse, and the unfortunate individual who thinks he can treat Senators just as we are getting to treat almost everybody else who does anything for us, will doubtless have to tell his story to a jury in a criminal court. All the same, the distinction which he finds difficulty in drawing is a bit vague to some others. The tip is altogether too demoralizing to both the morals and the self-respect of the community.

THE PARCEL-POST AGAIN

THE first half-year of the parcel-post has justified the expectation that the service will earn a profit to the government of from fifteen to twenty million dollars the first year. This with the weight limit too low, the rates generally too high, and the business only in the experimental stage. Certainly the showing justifies the next step, which must be a long one if it is to make the parcel-post a real public utility such as the country needs.

The present weight limit of eleven pounds moves almost nothing which directly affects the effort to bring producer and consumer closer together and to make their exchanges direct and cheap. A peck of potatoes is outside the limit; so is a self-respecting ham.

It is proposed by one of the parcel-post experts to fix a rate of three cents for the first pound and one-half cent for each additional pound within a hundred-mile zone. This, it is calculated, would pay expenses and leave twenty per cent profit. Under such rates, the town householder could have a contract with a farmer for a weekly hamper of produce—weight, fifty pounds; contents, assorted vegetables, fruit, poultry, and eggs; total cost of delivery, from farm to city home, twenty-seven and one-half cents. On a hamper weighing one hundred pounds, the cost would figure fifty-two and one-half cents.

With weight limit and other conditions as now, there cannot be a fair test of the possibilities of this kind of exchange. A C. O. D. stamp plan has been initiated, which is a step forward; it should be carried into the realm of big parcels, so that the post-office would collect and remit for the hamper, if desired.

Parcel-post experimentation has gone just far enough to prove that there is a vast demand for it on a big, practical scale. It should be expanded to that scale as fast as physical conditions can be adjusted to it.

OVEREDUCATION OR MISEDUCATION?

A WESTERN college president has been telling the Illinois vice commission that education is a good deal out of kilter these times. He opines that the high schools and colleges ought to teach fewer subjects to most of their students, to teach them better, and somewhat to specialize, so as to fit their graduates for specific careers.

Perhaps he is right; at any rate there is an increasing disposition to take his view. Educational systems seem to fall under the criticism that they undertake to outfit their graduates with a complete stock of information and culture. There is no use trying that, for it can't be done.

The individuals who have the faculty for accumulating information and culture will be acquiring these all their lives. They will not stop when they take their diplomas. If they were going to do so, they might remain at the university permanently without accumulating a stock worth anything to them.

In these days, with the vast extension of human knowledge, there is more information available than anybody can absorb. It would seem to be the business of education to give its subject a general notion about the special department which he desires to investigate, and to teach him to use some of the card-index systems by which knowledge can be made accessible.

The extraordinary intellect that is capable of reaching out to the whole field of knowledge, and of drawing it in and utilizing it from all quarters, does not need special attention. That sort of intellect will take care of itself. Educational systems must be made for average folks, and nearly everybody comes within that classification.

THE COLLEGES AND THEIR SONS

THE endowment of colleges by their living alumni, while the donors are in the prime of life and the full success of their activity, is an idea that might be more widely utilized to the advantage of the higher education.

Harvard has led the way famously. Her alumni have been taught to cultivate the "hundred-thousand-dollar habit" in a fashion that should stimulate the graduates of other universities to emulate the example. Beginning in 1904, the "twenty-five year" class, which is especially selected for honors at commencement time, adopted the plan of showing its gratitude and loyalty by ma-

king a gift of one hundred thousand dollars to the funds at the disposal of the authorities, without condition as to how the money should be expended. Ten years have now passed since the graduates of 1879 set the pace, and at each recurring commencement the men who have been at work in the world for a quarter-century have made a similar contribution.

Even to Harvard, the endowment of an unrestricted million has proved a great boon. So much of the money that is bequeathed to colleges is tied up by being designated for specific purposes that it does little or no good at the strategic points on which the trustees are anxious to center their efforts in expansion and upbuilding. Free-hand giving counts doubly in practical benefit, just as the giver who acts ungrudgingly is said to give twice to his cause.

To the Harvard class of twenty-five years' standing, at the present time, the raising of a hundred-thousand-dollar fund is no great task. The money is drawn from well over two hundred contributors. Not many institutions can expect to see so large a number of alumni return for their quarter-century celebration; but the principle embodied in the endowment is one that may inspire the sons of other colleges to see how nearly they can approach it.

THE COMMUNITY AND THE CRIMINAL

A RECENT international gathering of police officials developed, even among these highly practical gentlemen of the night-stick and the uniform, a gratifying perception of the social ideals with which advanced thinkers approach the problems of crime. Prevention of crime—social sanitation to discourage its development—is as popular now as the notion of killing off the mosquito to eradicate yellow fever, or purifying a city's water-supply in order to lower the death-rate from typhoid.

Society doesn't blame the criminal and seek vengeance against him, as it used to do. Instead, it feels its own responsibility for him, and turns an introspective eye upon its own processes, wondering just what it has done to make a criminal of that unfortunate, and how it can avoid making more like him.

Better tenements, liability acts, factory inspection, child-labor statutes, are the fruits of this self-examination by society. There is disposition to take finger-prints of social and industrial conditions, rather than of malefactors; to cross-section and study the faults of the community more, and worry less about complete collections of photographs in the rogues' galleries.

Society is learning in a broad way the truth that wrong-doing is not prevented by the severity of the punishments meted out for it. Its first duty is not to punish crime, but to prevent it.

The cost of saving a weakling from a life of crime to a career of usefulness is amply repaid by him. Put it on the lowest commercial basis—it pays. No idealism is necessary to grasp the significance of that fact.

THE LANGUAGE AS SHE IS SPELLED

MEMBERS of Congress and newspaper correspondents at Washington recently held a spelling-bee in which, by a narrow margin, the statesmen won over the scribes. Whereupon there ensued a great deal of more or less pointless discussion about spelling English, with various suggestions of reformed and phonetic and "natural" spelling.

English can't be spelled phonetically or naturally, with an alphabet of twen-

ty-six letters, some of them needless, to represent forty-odd sounds. The "natural" rule of "spelling it just as it sounds" would enable one to spell the breakfast beverage according to the dictionary—which is a perfectly phonetic rendering—or to drop every letter in that combination and spell it just as phonetically without any of them. "C-o-f-f-e-e" or "k-a-u-p-h-y" would be equally within the rule.

There is no royal road to easy spelling. Some people do it more easily than others, but generally the people who try, who realize that bad spelling is slovenly and inexcusable, do best. We excuse the amiable weakness of bad spelling in geniuses, but it's by no means a sign of genius; more likely a sign of laziness or plain ignorance.

The bad spelling of Washington and Carnegie doesn't equip some other bad speller to be father of his country or master of an imperial industry. It merely disqualifies him for a stenographer's job, in which, unfortunately, it isn't possible to slur over the letters as in the good old easy days of the quill. The universality of the writing-machine makes it more necessary than ever before to know how to spell. The spelling-bee has gone out of fashion in the generation that needs it most of all.

PRACTICAL HELP TO WORKING GIRLS

EVERY once in a while there is chronicled some practical piece of altruism that acts as a healthy antidote for the blunders so often committed in the name of humanity. One of these refreshing innovations was the result of a strike in a certain branch of the garment-making industry in New York.

Many of the workers in this trade are foreign-born girls in their early teens. As soon as they reach America they are caught up in the grim and sordid machinery of wage-earning. In few cases do they get any schooling except what they had before they left their native heath. Once engulfed by the tide of work, there is little opportunity for mental improvement. They either stick to their trade or get married.

Some intelligent and liberal-minded employers have recently put in operation a scheme to enable such girls to go to school while they are working. Special courses have been arranged for them in some of the public schools, and they will hereafter divide their time between the factory and the class-room. Their pay will continue just as if there was no interference with their working time.

As yet, only a few girls have been designated, for the plan is an experiment; but if it works out successfully—and its success depends entirely upon the girls themselves—it will have a wider introduction this autumn.

Now this idea of free instruction, beneficent as it seems, is no act of charity on the part of the employers. It is a good human investment. By increasing the intelligence and mental efficiency of the worker, you improve the whole plane of his or her work. Among these raw immigrant workers of to-day are the forewomen and employers of to-morrow. The better you equip them, the higher will be the whole future cast of the trade.

Such procedure as this is the natural result of the working out of the so-called Protocol, which was described in last month's issue of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE. Slowly but surely the employer and the employee are meeting on a common ground of mutual understanding and mutual benefit. Violence and antagonism are being superseded by the rule of reason.

THE LIGHT OF WESTERN STARS*

BY ZANE GREY

AUTHOR OF "RIDERS OF THE PURPLE SAGE," ETC.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED

ALFRED HAMMOND, the wayward son of a rich New Yorker, has left home to become a cattleman in New Mexico, and for several years has had little communication with his family. His sister, Madeline, known to her friends as "Majesty"—aged twenty-four, and possessed of a fortune of her own—suddenly decides to visit him. She telegraphs to him, but when her train arrives at El Cajon, about midnight, he is not at the station.

Her reception is a startling one. There has been a wedding at El Cajon that evening, and Gene Stewart, a reckless cowboy, has made a drunken wager that he will marry the first girl who comes to town. Encountering Miss Hammond at the station, he strips off her glove to see if she has a wedding-ring. Finding none, he drags in a terrified Mexican priest, and forces him, at the muzzle of a revolver, to hurry through some form of words, which Madeline is too utterly dazed to understand. The strange ceremony is broken off, however, when Stewart learns that she is Alfred Hammond's sister. He takes her to the house where her brother's *fiancée*, Florence Kingsley, lives with a married sister.

Here, in the morning, Alfred and Madeline meet. She finds that her brother has not prospered in business, and that he is now foreman on Bill Stillwell's ranch. Gene Stewart is deeply repentant, but the expected trouble between him and Alfred Hammond is averted by Madeline's diplomatic version of the events of the previous night. That same day, however, Stewart gets into a fight with Pat Hawe, the sheriff, and to escape Hawe's vengeance he "hits the trail" for Mexico.

On the next day Madeline goes out with Florence, Alfred, and a party of cowboys, to Stillwell's ranch in the foot-hills fifty miles from El Cajon. She finds life there so congenial that she purchases the place, installing Stillwell as manager. She also buys a neighboring ranch from its owner, Don Carlos, a Mexican, who, however, does not immediately vacate.

Gene Stewart, who is fighting with the revolutionists in Mexico, and winning fame as "El Capitan," sends his horse, a splendid roan charger, as a present to Madeline. When the fighting ceases for a time, he is heard of in the border towns, drinking and brawling. To save him, Madeline sends Stillwell to bring him to the ranch; and when the cattleman fails, she herself seeks out Stewart and persuades him to promise that he will return.

XV

TOWARD the end of the week Stillwell informed Madeline that Stewart had arrived at the ranch and had taken up quarters with Nels.

"Gene's sick. He looks mighty bad," said the old cattleman. "He's so weak an' shaky he can't lift a cup. A little liquor would straighten him up, but Nels can't force him to drink a drop, an' has hed to sneak some in his coffee. He's forgotten a lot. I was goin' to tell him what he did to me up at Rodeo; but I know, if he'd

believe it, he'd be sicker than he is. Either Gene's losin' his mind, or he's got somethin' powerful strange on it."

From that time Stillwell, who evidently found Madeline his most sympathetic listener, unburdened himself daily of his hopes and fears and conjectures.

Stewart began slowly to mend, and presently he was able to get up and about. It was a good augury of his progress that the cowboys once more took up the teasing relation which had been characteristic of them before his illness. A cowboy must indeed be out of sorts when he cannot vent

* This story began in the May number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE

his peculiar humor on somebody or something.

"Wal, the boys are sure after Gene," said Stillwell, with his huge smile. "They josh him all the time about how he hangs around jest to get a glimpse of you, Miss Majesty. Sure all the boys hev a pretty bad case over their boss, but none of them is a marker to Gene. He's got it so bad, Miss Majesty, thet he actooly don't know they're joshin' him. He takes every word an' smiles dreamy like, an' jest looks an' looks. Why, he's beginnin' to make me tired. He'll never run thet bunch of cowboys if he doesn't wake up."

Madeline smiled her amusement, and told Stillwell that he wanted too much in such short time from a man who had suffered grievous injury in body and mind.

It had been impossible for Madeline to fail to observe Stewart's singular behavior. She never went out to take her customary walks and rides without seeing him somewhere in the distance. When she sat on the porch during the afternoon, or at sunset, he could always be descried at some point near. He idled listlessly in the sun, lounged on the porch of his bunk-house, sat whittling the top bar of the corral fence; and always it seemed to Madeline he was watching her, though he avoided meeting her.

Once, while going the round with her gardener, she encountered Stewart and greeted him kindly. He said little, but he was not embarrassed. She did not recognize in his face any feature that she remembered. He was pale, haggard, drawn. His eyes held a shadow through which shone a soft, subdued light. Madeline fancied that it was like the light in Majesty's eyes, and in the dumb, worshiping eyes of her favorite staghound. She told Stewart that she hoped he would soon be in the saddle again, and passed on her way.

Stewart recovered his strength, though not in time to ride at the spring round-up; and Stillwell discussed with Madeline the advisability of making the cowboy his foreman.

"Gene seems to be gettin' along," said the ranchman, "but he ain't like his old self. I think more of him, at thet; but where's his spirit? The boys'd ride roughshod all over him. Mebbe I'd do best to wait longer now, as the slack season is on. All the same, if those vaqueros of Don Carlos's don't lay low, I'll send Gene over there. Thet'll wake him up!"

A few days afterward Stillwell came to Madeline rubbing his big hands in satisfaction and wearing a grin that was enormous.

"Miss Majesty, listen to me. I've somethin' strange to tell you. Them greasers down on our slope hev been gettin' prosperous. They're growin' like bad weeds; an' they got a new *padre*—the little old feller from El Cajon, Padre Marcos. Wal, this was all right, all the boys thought, except Gene; but he got blacker'n thunder an' roared round like a dehorned bull. I was sure glad to see he could get mad again. Then Gene haid down the slope fer the church. Nels an' me follered him, thinkin' he might hev been took sudden with a crazy spell or somethin'. He hasn't never been jest right yet since he left off drinkin'. Wal, we run into him comin' out of the church. We never was so dumfounded in our lives. Gene was crazy, all right—he sure hed a spell; but it was the *kind* of a spell he hed thet paralyzed us. He ran past us like a streak, an' we follered. We couldn't ketch him. We heerd him laugh—the strangest laugh I ever heerd! You'd thought the feller was suddenly made a king. He was like thet feller who was tied in a buryin'-sack an' throwed into the sea, an' cut his way out, an' swam to the island where the treasures was, an' stood up yellin': 'The world is mine!' Wal, when we got up to his bunk-house he was gone. He didn't come back all day an' all night. Frankie Slade, who has a sharp tongue, said Gene hed gone crazy fer liquor, an' thet was his finish. Nels was some worried, an' I was sick.

"Wal, this mawnin' I went over to Nels's bunk. Some of the fellers was there, all speculatin' about Gene. Then big as life Gene struts round the corner. He wasn't the same Gene. His face was pale an' his eyes burned like fire. He hed thet old cool, mockin' smile, an' somethin' besides, thet I couldn't understand. Frankie Slade up an' made a remark—no wuss than he'd been makin' fer days—an' Gene tumbled him out of his chair, punched him good, walked all over him. Frankie wasn't hurt so much as he was bewildered.

"'Gene,' he says, 'what on earth struck you?'

"An' Gene says, kind of sweet like:

"'Frankie, you may be a nice feller when you're alone, but your talk's offensive to a gentleman.'

"After that what was said to Gene was with a nice smile. Now, Miss Majesty, it's beyond me what to allow for Gene's sudden change. First off I thought Padre Marcos had converted him. I actooly thought that; but I reckon it's only Gene Stewart come back—the old Gene Stewart an' some. That's all I care about. I'm rememberin' how I once told you that Gene was the last of the cowboys. Perhaps I should hev said he's the last of my kind of cowboys. Wal, Miss Majesty, you'll be appreciatin' of what I meant from now on."

It was also beyond Madeline to account for Gene Stewart's antics. Making allowance for the old cattleman's fancy, she did not weigh his story very heavily. She guessed why Stewart might have been angry at the presence of Padre Marcos. Madeline supposed that it was rather an unusual circumstance for a cowboy to be converted to religious belief; but it was possible. She knew that religious fervor often manifested itself in extremes of feeling and action. Most likely, in Stewart's case, his real manner had been both misunderstood and exaggerated. However, she had a curious desire, which she did not wholly admit to herself, to see the cowboy and make her own deductions.

The opportunity did not present itself for nearly two weeks. Stewart had taken up his duties as foreman, and his activities were ceaseless. He was absent most of the time ranging down toward the Mexican line. When he returned, Stillwell sent for him.

This was late in the afternoon of a day in the middle of April. Alfred and Florence were with Madeline on the porch. They saw the cowboy turn his horse over to one of the Mexican boys at the corral, and then come with weary step up to the house, beating the dust out of his gauntlets. Little streams of gray sand trickled from his sombrero as he removed it and bowed to the women.

Madeline saw the man she remembered, but with a singularly different aspect. His skin was brown; his eyes were piercing and dark and steady; he carried himself erect; he seemed preoccupied, and there was not a trace of embarrassment in his manner.

"Wal, Gene, I'm sure glad to see you," Stillwell was saying. "Where do you hail from?"

"Guadalupe Cañon," replied Stewart.

Stillwell whistled.

"Way down there! You don't mean you follered them hoss tracks that far?"

"All the way from Don Carlos's ranch across the Mexican line. I took Nick Steele with me. Nick is the best tracker in the outfit. This trail we were on led along the foot-hill valleys. First we thought whoever made it was hunting for water; but they passed two ranches without watering. At Seaton's Wash they dug for water. Here they met a pack-train of burros that came down the mountain trail. The burros were heavily loaded. Horse and burro tracks struck south from Seaton's to the old California emigrant road. We followed the trail through Guadalupe Cañon and across the border. On the way back we stopped at Slaughter's Ranch, where the United States cavalry are camping. There we met foresters from the Peloncillo forest reserve. If these fellows knew anything, they kept it to themselves; so we hit the trail home."

"Wal, I reckon you know enough?" inquired Stillwell slowly.

"I reckon," replied Stewart.

"Wal, out with it then," said Stillwell gruffly. "I reckon Miss Hammond can't be kept in the dark much longer. Make your report to her."

The cowboy shifted his dark gaze to Madeline. He was cool and slow.

"We're losing a few cattle on the open range. Night drives by vaqueros. Some of these cattle are driven across the valley, others up into the foot-hills. So far as I can find out, no cattle are being driven south; so this raiding is a blind to fool the cowboys. Don Carlos is a Mexican rebel. He located his ranch here a few years ago and pretended to raise cattle. All that time he has been smuggling arms and ammunition across the border. He was for Madero against Diaz. Now he is against Madero, because he and all the rebels think Madero failed to keep his promises. There will be another revolution. And all the arms go from the States across the border. Those burros I told about were packed with contraband goods."

"That's a matter for the United States cavalry. They are patrolling the border," said Alfred.

"They can't stop the smuggling of arms—not down in that wild corner," replied Stewart.

"What is my—my duty? What has it

to do with me?" inquired Madeline, somewhat perturbed.

"Wal, Miss Majesty, I reckon it hasn't nothing to do with you," put in Stillwell. "Thet's my bizness an' Stewart's; but I jest wanted you to know. There might be some trouble follerin' my orders."

"Your orders?"

"I want to send Stewart over to fire Don Carlos an' his vaqueros off the range. They've got to go. Don Carlos is breakin' the law of the United States, an' doin' it on our property an' with our hosses. Hev I your permission, Miss Hammond?"

"Why, assuredly you have! Alfred, what do you think best?"

"It'll make trouble, Majesty, but it's got to be done," replied Alfred. "Here you have a crowd of Eastern friends due next month, and we want the range to ourselves then. But, Stillwell, if you drive those vaqueros off, won't they hang around in the foot-hills? I declare they are a bad lot."

Stillwell's mind was not at ease. He paced the porch with a frown clouding his brow.

"Gene, I reckon you got this greaser deal figgered better'n me," said Stillwell. "Now what do you say?"

"He'll have to be forced off," replied Stewart quietly. "The don's pretty slick, but his vaqueros are bad actors. It's just this way. Nels said to me, the other day: 'Gene, I haven't packed a gun for years until lately, and it feels good whenever I meet any of those strange greasers.' You see, Stillwell, Don Carlos has vaqueros coming and going all the time. They're guerrilla bands, that's all, and they're getting uglier. There have been several shooting scrapes lately. A rancher named White, who lives up the valley, was badly hurt. It's only a matter of time till something stirs up the boys here. Stillwell, you know Nels and Monty and Nick."

"Sure, I know 'em; an' you're not mentionin' one more particular cowboy in my outfit," said Stillwell, with a dry chuckle and a glance at Stewart.

Madeline divined the covert meaning, and a slight chill passed over her, as if a cold wind had blown in from the hills.

"Stewart, I see you carry a gun," she said, pointing to a black handle protruding from a sheath swinging low along his leather chaps.

"Yes, ma'am."

"Why do you carry it?" she asked.

"Well," he drawled, "it's not a pretty gun—and it's sure heavy."

She caught the inference. The gun was not an ornament. His keen, steady, dark gaze caused her vague alarm. She had to do with a question involving human life; and the value she placed upon human life, and its spiritual significance, were matters as far as the width of the world from this cowboy's thought.

A strange idea flashed up. Did she place too much value upon all human life? She checked that, wondering, almost horrified, at herself. And then her intuition told her that she possessed a stronger power to move these primitive men than any stern rule or order.

"Stewart, I do not fully understand what you hint that Nels and his comrades might do. Please be frank with me. Do you mean Nels would shoot upon little provocation?"

"Miss Hammond, as far as Nels is concerned, shooting is now just a matter of his meeting several of Don Carlos's vaqueros. It's sure wonderful what Nels has stood from them, considering the Mexicans he's already killed."

"Already killed! Stewart, you are not in earnest?" cried Madeline, shocked.

"I reckon I am. Nels has seen hard life along the Arizona border. He likes peace as well as any man, but a few quiet years don't change what the early days made of him. As for Nick Steele and Monty, they're just bad actors, and looking for trouble."

"How about yourself, Stewart? Stillwell's remark was not lost upon me," said Madeline, prompted by curiosity.

Stewart did not reply. He looked at her in respectful silence. In her keen earnestness Madeline saw beneath his cool exterior, and was all the more baffled. Was there an inscrutable mocking light in his eyes, or was it only her imagination? The cowboy's face was as hard as flint.

"Stewart, I have come to love my ranch," said Madeline slowly, "and I care a great deal for my—my cowboys. It would be dreadful if they were to kill anybody, or especially if one of them should be killed."

"Miss Hammond, you've changed things considerable out here, but you can't change these men. All that's needed to start them is a little trouble; and this revo-

lution is bound to make rough times along some of the wilder passes across the border. We're in line, that's all, and the boys are getting stirred up."

"Very well, then, I must accept the inevitable. I can see that some of my cowboys cannot be checked much longer; but, Stewart, whatever you have been in the past, you have changed." She smiled at him, and her voice was singularly sweet and rich. "Stillwell has so often referred to you as the last of his kind of cowboy. I have just a faint idea of what a wild life you have led. Perhaps that fits you to be a leader of such rough men. I am no judge of what a leader should do in this crisis. My cowboys are incurring risk in my employ; my property is not safe; perhaps my life even might be endangered. I want to rely upon you, since Stillwell believes, and I, too, that you are the man for this place. I shall give you no orders, but—is it too much to ask that you will be my kind of a cowboy?"

"Miss Hammond, what kind of a cowboy is that?"

"I—I don't exactly know. It is the kind I feel you *might* be. But I do know that in the problem at hand I want your actions to be governed by reason, not passion. Human life is not for any man to sacrifice, unless in self-defense or in protecting those dependent upon him. What Stillwell and you hinted makes me afraid of Nels and Nick Steele and Monty. Cannot they be controlled? I want to feel that they will not go gunning for Don Carlos's men. I want to avoid all violence, and yet, when my guests come, I want to feel that they will be safe from danger and annoyance. May I not rely upon you, Stewart? Can't I trust you to manage these obstreperous cowboys and protect my property and Alfred's and take care of us—of me—until this revolution is ended? I have never had a day's worry since I bought the ranch. It is not that I want to shirk my responsibilities; it is that I like being happy. May I put so much faith in you?"

"I hope so—I reckon so, Miss Hammond," replied Stewart.

It was an instant response, but none the less fraught with consciousness of responsibility. He waited a moment, and then, as neither Stillwell nor Madeline offered further speech, he bowed and turned down the path.

"Wal, wal!" exclaimed Stillwell. "That's no little job you give him, Miss Majesty."

"It was a woman's cunning, Stillwell," said Alfred. "My sister used to be a wonder at getting her own way when we were kids. Just a smile or two, a few sweet words—and she had what she wanted."

"Al, what a character to give me!" protested Madeline. "Indeed, I was deeply in earnest with Stewart. I do not understand just why, but I trust him. He seems like iron and steel. Then I was a little frightened at the prospect of trouble with the vaqueros. Both you and Stillwell have taught me to look upon Stewart as invaluable. I thought it best to confess my utter helplessness and to look to him for support."

"Majesty, whatever actuated you, it was a stroke of diplomacy," replied her brother. "The fellow has good stuff in him; but remember, he's a composite of tiger-breed and forked lightning, and don't imagine he has failed you if he gets into a fight."

"I'll sure tell you what Gene Stewart will do," said Florence. "Don't I know cowboys? Why, they used to take me up on their horses when I was a baby. Gene Stewart will be the kind of cowboy your sister said he *might* be, whatever that is. She may not know and we may not guess, but he knows."

"Wal, Flo, there you hit plumb center," replied the old cattleman. "An' I couldn't be gladder if he was my own son!"

XVI

EARLY the following morning Stewart, with a company of cowboys, departed for Don Carlos's rancho. As the day wore on without any report from him, Stillwell appeared to grow more at ease; and at nightfall he told Madeline that he guessed there was now no reason for concern.

"Wal, though, it's sure amazin' strange," he continued. "I've been worryin' some about how we was goin' to fire Don Carlos; but Gene has a way of doin' things."

Next day Stillwell and Alfred decided to ride over to Don Carlos's place, taking Madeline and Florence with them, and to stop at Alfred's ranch on the return trip. They started in the cool gray dawn; and after three hours' riding, as the sun began to get bright, they entered a mesquit grove surrounding corrals and barns, a number of low, squat buildings, and a huge, rambling structure, all built of adobe and most-

ly crumbling to ruin. Only one green spot relieved the bald red of grounds and walls; and this, evidently, was made by the spring which had given both value and fame to Don Carlos's range.

The approach to the house was through a wide courtyard, bare, stony, hard-packed, with hitching-rails and watering-troughs in front of a long porch. Several dusty, tired horses stood with drooping heads and bridles down.

"Wal, dog-gone it, Al! If there ain't Pat Hawe's hoss, I'll eat it," exclaimed Stillwell.

"What's Pat want here, anyhow?" growled Alfred.

No one was in sight, but Madeline heard loud voices coming from the house. Stillwell dismounted at the porch and stalked in at the door. Alfred leaped off his horse and helped Florence and Madeline down. Then, bidding them rest and wait on the porch, he followed Stillwell.

"I hate these Mexican places," said Florence, with a grimace. "They're so mysterious and creepy. Just watch now! There'll be dark-skinned, beady-eyed, soft-footed greasers slip right up out of the ground. There'll be an ugly face in every door and window and crack."

"It's like a huge barn with its characteristic odor permeated by tobacco-smoke," replied Madeline, sitting down beside Florence. "I don't think very much of this end of my purchase. Florence, isn't that Don Carlos's black horse over there in the corral?"

"It sure is. Then the don's beah yet. I wish we hadn't been in such a hurry to come over. There! That doesn't sound encouraging."

From the corridor came the rattling of spurs, the tramping of boots, and loud voices. Madeline detected Alfred's tone of annoyance.

"We'll rustle back home, then," he said.

The answer came:

"No!"

Madeline recognized Stewart's voice, and she quickly straightened up.

"I won't have them in here," went on Alfred.

"Outdoors or in, they've got to be with us!" replied Stewart sharply.

"Listen, Al," came the boom of Stillwell's big voice; "now that we've butted in over hyar with the girls, you let Stewart run things."

Then a crowd of men tramped pell-mell out upon the porch. Stewart, dark-browed and somber, was in the lead. Nels hung close to him, and Madeline's quick glance saw that Nels had undergone some indescribable change. The grinning, brilliant-eyed Don Carlos came jostling out beside a gaunt, sharp-featured man wearing a silver shield. This no doubt was Pat Hawe. In the background, behind Stillwell and Alfred, stood Nick Steele, towering head and shoulders over a number of vaqueros and cowboys.

"Miss Hammond, I'm sorry you came," said Stewart bluntly, "we're in a muddle here. I've insisted that you and Flo should be kept close to us. I'll explain later. If you can't stop your ears, I beg you to overlook rough talk." With that he turned to the men behind him. "Nick, take Booly, go back to Monty and the boys. Fetch out that stuff—all of it! Rustle now!"

Stillwell and Alfred disengaged themselves from the crowd, to take up positions in front of Madeline and Florence. Pat Hawe leaned against a post and insolently ogled Madeline, and then Florence. Don Carlos pressed forward. Madeline seemed to see him from his great high-top boots upward. It was a slow, fascinated glance she let rise over him.

He wore tight velvet breeches, with a heavy fold down the outside seam which was ornamented with silver buttons. Round his waist he had a sash and a belt with fringed holster, from which protruded a pearl-handled gun. A vest or waistcoat, richly embroidered, partly concealed a blouse of silk, and wholly revealed a silken scarf round his neck.

His swarthy face showed dark lines, like cords, under the surface. His little eyes were exceedingly prominent and glittering. To Madeline his face seemed to be a bold, handsome mask, through which his eyes piercingly betrayed the nature of the man.

He bowed low, with elaborate and sinuous grace. His smile revealed brilliant teeth and enhanced the brilliance of his eyes. He slowly spread deprecatory hands.

"*Señoritas*, I beg a thousand pardons," he said. How strange it was for Madeline to hear English spoken with a soft, winningly sweet accent! "The gracious hospitality of Don Carlos has passed with his house."

Stewart stepped forward. Thrusting Don Carlos aside, he called:

"Make way, there!"

The crowd fell back to the tramp of heavy boots. Cowboys appeared, staggering out of the corridor with long boxes. These they placed side by side upon the floor of the porch.

"Now, Hawe, we'll proceed with our business," said Stewart. "You see these boxes, don't you?"

"I reckon I see a good many things round hyar," replied Hawe meaningly.

"Well, do you intend to open these boxes upon my say-so?"

"No," retorted Hawe. "It's not my place to meddle with property as come by express an' all accounted fer regular."

"You call yourself a sheriff!" exclaimed Stewart scornfully.

"Mebbe you'll think so before long," rejoined Hawe sullenly.

"I'll open them. Here, one of you boys, knock the tops off these boxes," ordered Stewart. "No, not you, Monty. You use your eyes. Let Booly handle the ax. Rustle now!"

Monty Price had jumped out of the crowd into the middle of the porch. The manner in which he gave way to Booly and faced the vaqueros was not significant of friendliness or trust.

"Stewart, you're dead wrong to bust open them boxes. Thet's ag'in' the law," protested Hawe, trying to interfere.

Stewart pushed him back. Then Don Carlos, who had been stunned by the appearance of the boxes, suddenly became active in speech and person. Stewart thrust him back, also. The Mexican's excitement increased. He wildly gesticulated; he exclaimed shrilly in Spanish. When, however, the lids were wrenched open and an inside packing was torn away, he grew rigid and silent.

Madeline raised herself behind Stillwell to see that the boxes were full of rifles and ammunition.

"There, Hawe! What did I tell you?" demanded Stewart. "I came over here to take charge of this ranch. I found these boxes hidden in an unused room. I suspected what they were—contraband goods!"

"Wal, supposin' they are? I don't see any call fer sich an all-fired fuss as you're makin'. Stewart, I calkilate you're some stuck on your new job, an' want to make a big show before—"

"Hawe, stop slinging that kind of talk," interrupted Stewart. "You got too free

with your mouth once before! Now here—I'm supposed to be consulting an officer of the law. Will you take charge of these contraband goods?"

"Say, you're holdin' on high an' mighty," replied Hawe, in astonishment that was plainly pretended. "What're you drivin' at, hey?"

Stewart muttered an imprecation. He took several swift strides across the porch, and held out his hands to Stillwell as if to indicate the hopelessness of intelligent and reasonable arbitration. He looked at Madeline with a glance eloquent of his regret that he could not handle the situation to please her. Then, as he wheeled, he came face to face with Nels, who had slipped forward out of the crowd.

Madeline gathered serious import from the steel-blue flash of eyes whereby Nels communicated something to Stewart. Whatever that something was, it dispelled Stewart's impatience. A slight movement of his hand brought Monty Price forward with a jump. In these sudden jumps of Monty's there was a suggestion of restrained ferocity. Then Nels and Monty lined up behind Stewart. It was a deliberate action and unmistakably formidable, even to Madeline.

Pat Hawe's face took on an ugly look; his eyes had a reddish gleam. Don Carlos added a pale face and extreme nervousness to his former expressions of agitation. The cowboys edged away from the vaqueros and the bronzed, bearded horsemen who were evidently Hawe's assistants.

"I'm driving at this," spoke up Stewart presently, and now he was slow and caustic. "Here's contraband of war! Hawe, do you get that? Arms and ammunition for the rebels across the border! I charge you as an officer to confiscate these goods and to arrest the smuggler, Don Carlos!"

These words of Stewart's precipitated a riot among Don Carlos's followers, and they surged wildly around the sheriff. There were an upflying of brown, clenching hands and a shrill, jabbering babel of Mexican voices. The crowd around Don Carlos grew louder and denser with the addition of armed vaqueros, barefooted stable-boys, dusty-booted herdsmen, and blanketed Mexicans, the last of whom suddenly slipped from doors and windows and round corners.

Shrill cries, evidently from Don Carlos, somewhat quieted the commotion. Then

Don Carlos could be heard addressing Sheriff Hawe in an exhortation of mingled English and Spanish. He denied, he avowed, he proclaimed, and all in rapid, passionate utterance. He tossed his black hair in his vehemence; he waved his fists and stamped the floor; he rolled his glittering eyes; he twisted his thin lips into a hundred different shapes and, like a cornered wolf, showed snarling white teeth.

It seemed to Madeline that Don Carlos denied knowledge of the boxes of contraband goods; then knowledge of their real contents; then knowledge of their destination; and, finally, everything except that they were there in sight, damning witnesses to somebody's complicity in the breaking of neutrality laws. Passionate as had been his denial of all this, it was as nothing compared to his denunciation of Stewart.

"Señor Stewart, he keel my vaquero!" shouted Don Carlos, as, sweating and spent, he concluded his arraignment of the cowboy. "Him you must arrest! Señor Stewart a bad man! He keel my vaquero!"

"Do you hear that?" yelled Hawe. "The don's got you figgered fer that little job at El Cajon last fall."

The clamor burst into a roar. Hawe began shaking his finger in Stewart's face and hoarsely shouting.

Then a lithe young vaquero, swift as an Indian, glided under Hawe's uplifted arm. Whatever the action he intended, he was too late for its execution. Stewart lunged out, struck him, and knocked him off the porch. As he fell, a dagger glittered in the sunlight and rolled clinking over the stones.

The man went down hard and did not move. With the same abrupt violence Stewart threw Hawe off the porch, then Don Carlos, who, being less supple, fell heavily. Then the mob backed before Stewart's rush until all were down in the courtyard.

The shuffling of feet ceased, the clanking of spurs, and the shouting. Nels and Monty, now reenforced by Nick Steele, were as shadows of Stewart, so closely did they follow him. Stewart waved them back and stepped down into the yard. He was absolutely fearless, but what struck Madeline so keenly was his magnificent disdain. Manifestly he knew the nature of the men with whom he was dealing. From the look of him it was natural for Madeline to expect them to give way before him—which they did, even Hawe and his attendants sullenly retreating.

Don Carlos got up to confront Stewart. The prostrate vaquero stirred and moaned, but did not rise.

"You needn't gibber Spanish to me," said Stewart. "You can talk American and you can understand American. If you start a rough-house here, you and your greasers will be cleaned up. You've got to leave this ranch. You can have the stock, the packs, and traps in the second corral. There's grub, too. Saddle up and hit the trail! If you don't, I'll have the United States cavalry here in six hours, and you can gamble they'll get what my cowboys leave of you!"

Don Carlos was either a capital actor, or else he was thoroughly cowed by reference to the troops.

"*Si, señor! Gracias, señor!*" he exclaimed, and then, turning away, he called to his men.

They hurried after him, while the fallen vaquero got to his feet with Stewart's help and staggered across the courtyard. In a moment they were gone, leaving Hawe and his several comrades behind.

Hawe was spitefully ejecting a wad of tobacco from his mouth and swearing in an undertone about "white-livered greasers." He cocked his red eye speculatively at Stewart.

"Wal, I reckon as you're so bent on doin' it up brown that you'll try to fire me off'n the range, too?"

"If I ever do, Pat, you'll need to be carried off," replied Stewart. "Just now I'm positively inviting you and your deputy sheriffs to leave."

"We'll go, but we're comin' back one of these days, an' when we do, we'll put you in irons!"

"Hawe, if you've got it in that bad for me, come over here in the corral and let's fight it out."

"I'm an officer, an' I don't fight out-laws an' sich, except when I hev to make arrests."

"Officer! You're a disgrace to the county. If you ever did get irons on me, you'd take me some place out of sight, shoot me, and then swear you killed me in self-defense. It wouldn't be the first time you pulled that trick, Pat Hawe!"

"Ho! ho!" laughed Hawe derisively.

Then he started toward the horses. Stewart's long arm shot out and his hand clapped on Hawe's shoulder, spinning him round like a top.

"You're leaving, Pat, but before you leave you'll come out with your play, or you'll crawl," said Stewart. "You've got it in for me, man to man. Speak up now, an' prove you're not the cowardly skunk I've always thought you! I've called your hand."

Pat Hawe's face turned a blackish-purple hue.

"You can jest bet I've got it in fer you," he shouted hoarsely. "You're only a low-down, drunken cow-puncher! You never had a dollar or a decent job till you was mixed up with that Hammond woman—"

Stewart's hand flashed out and hit Hawe's face in a ringing slap. The sheriff's head jerked back, his sombrero fell to the ground. As he bent over to reach it, his hand shook, his arm shook, his whole body shook. Monty Price jumped straight forward and crouched down with a strange, wild utterance. Stewart seemed all at once rigid, bending a little.

"Say 'Miss Hammond,' if there's occasion to use her name," said Stewart, in a voice that seemed coolly pleasant, yet had a deadly under note.

Hawe did a moment's battle with strangling fury, which he conquered in some measure.

"I said you was a low-down, drunken cow-puncher, a tough, an' as near a desperado as we ever hed on the border," went on Hawe deliberately. His speech appeared to be addressed to Stewart, although his flame-pointed eyes were riveted upon Monty Price. "I know you plugged that vaquero last fall an', when I git my proof, I'm comin' after you!"

"That's all right, Hawe. You can call me what you like, and you can come after me when you like," replied Stewart; "but you're going to get in bad with me. You're in bad now with Monty and Nels. Pretty soon you'll queer yourself with all the cowboys and the ranchers, too. If that don't put sense into you, here, listen to this. You knew what these boxes contained. You know Don Carlos has been smuggling arms and ammunition across the border. You know he is hand and glove with the rebels. You've been wearing blinders, and it has been to your interest. Take a hunch from me. That's all. Light out now, and the less we see of your handsome mug, the better we'll like you!"

Muttering, cursing, pallid of face, Hawe climbed astride his horse. His comrades

followed suit. Certain it appeared that the sheriff was contending with more than fear and wrath. He must have had an irresistible impulse to fling invective and threat upon Stewart, but he was speechless. Savagely he spurred his horse, and, as it snorted and leaped, he turned in his saddle, shaking his fist.

His comrades led the way with their horses clattering into a canter. They disappeared through the gate.

XVII

LATER in the day, when Madeline and Florence, accompanied by Alfred and Stillwell, left Don Carlos's ranch, it was none too soon for Madeline. The inside of the Mexican's home was more unprepossessing and uncomfortable than the outside. The halls were dark, the rooms huge, empty, and musty. There was an air of silence and secrecy and mystery about them most fitting to the character that Florence had bestowed upon the place.

Alfred's ranch-house, on the other hand, where the party halted to spend the night, was picturesquely located, small, cozy, camplike in its arrangement, and altogether agreeable to Madeline.

The day's long rides and exciting events had wearied her. She rested while Florence and the two men got supper.

During the meal Stillwell expressed satisfaction over the good riddance of the vaqueros and, with his usual optimism, trusted he had seen the last of them. Alfred, too, took a decidedly favorable view of the day's proceedings; but Florence appeared unusually quiet and thoughtful. Madeline wondered a little at the cause. She remembered that Stewart had wished to come with them, or to detail a few cowboys to accompany them, but Alfred had laughed at the idea and would have none of it.

After supper Alfred monopolized the conversation by describing what he wanted to do to improve his home before he and Florence were married. Then, at an early hour, they all retired.

Madeline's slumbers were disturbed by a pounding upon the wall, and by Florence's crying out, in answer to a call of—

"Get up! Throw some clothes on and come out!"

It was Alfred's voice.

"What's the matter?" asked Florence, as she slipped out of bed.

"Alfred, is there anything wrong?" added Madeline, sitting up.

The room was dark as pitch, but a faint glow seemed to mark the position of the window.

"Oh, nothing much," replied Alfred. "Only Don Carlos's rancho going up in smoke!"

"Fire?" cried Florence sharply.

"You'll think so when you see it. Hurry out! Majesty, old girl, now you won't have to tear down that heap of adobe, as you threatened. I don't believe a wall will stand after that fire."

"Well, I'm glad of it," said Madeline. "A good healthy fire will purify the atmosphere over there and save me expense. Ugh, that haunted rancho got on my nerves! Florence, I do believe you've appropriated part of my riding-habit. Doesn't Alfred have lights in this house?"

Florence laughingly helped Madeline to dress. Then, hurrying through the dining-room, and stumbling over the chairs, they went out upon the porch. Away to the westward, low down along the horizon, they saw leaping red flames and wind-swept columns of smoke.

Stillwell appeared greatly perturbed.

"Al, I'm lookin' fer that ammunition to blow up," he said. "There was enough of it to blow the roof off the rancho."

"Bill, surely the cowboys would get that stuff out the first thing," replied Alfred anxiously.

"I reckon so; but all the same I'm worryin'. Mebbe there wasn't time. Supposin' that powder went off as the boys was goin' fer it, or carryin' it out! We'll know soon. If the explosion doesn't come quick now, we can figger the boys got the boxes out."

For the next few moments there was the silence of sustained and painful suspense. Florence gripped Madeline's arm. Madeline felt a fulness in her throat and a rapid beating of her heart. Presently she was relieved with the others when Stillwell declared the danger of an explosion need be feared no longer.

"Sure you can gamble on Gene Stewart," he added.

The night happened to be partly cloudy, with broken rifts showing the moon, and the wind blew unusually strong. The brightness of the fire seemed subdued. It was like a huge bonfire smothered by some great covering penetrated by different, widely separated points of flame. These

corners of flame flew up, curling in the wind, and then died down. Thus the scene was constantly changing from dull light to dark.

There came a moment when a blacker shade overspread the wide area of flickering gleams and then obliterated them. Night enfolded the scene. The moon peeped, a curved yellow rim, from under broken clouds.

To all appearances the fire had burned itself out; but suddenly a pin-point of light showed where all had been dense black. It grew and became long and sharp. It moved. It had life. It leaped up. Its color warmed from white to red. Then from all about it burst flame on flame, to leap into a great changing pillar of fire that climbed high and higher. Huge funnels of smoke, yellow, black, white, all tinged with the color of fire, slanted skyward, drifting away on the wind.

"Wal, I reckon we won't hev the good of them two thousand tons of alfalfa we was figgerin' on," remarked Stillwell.

"Ah! Then that last outbreak of fire was burning hay," said Madeline. "I don't regret the rancho, but it's too bad to lose such a quantity of good feed for the stock."

"It's lost, an' no mistake. The fire's dyin' as quick as she flared up. Wal, I hope none of the boys got risky to save a saddle or blanket. Monty's a terror for runnin' the gantlet of fire. He's like a hoss that's jest been dragged out of a burnin' stable an' runs back sure locoed. There! She's smolderin' down now. Reckon we-all might jest as well turn in again. It's only three o'clock."

"I wonder how the fire started," remarked Alfred. "Some careless cowboy's cigarette, I'll bet!"

Stillwell rolled out his laugh.

"Al, you sure are a free-hearted, trustin' feller! I'm some doubtin' the cigarette idee, but you can gamble, if it was a cigarette, it belonged to a cunnin' vaquero, an' wasn't dropped accident like."

"Bill, you don't mean Don Carlos burned the rancho?" ejaculated Alfred in mingled amaze and anger.

Again the old cattleman laughed.

"Powerful strange to say, my friend, ole Bill means jest that."

"Of course Don Carlos set that fire," put in Florence, with spirit. "Al, if you live out heah a hundred years, you'll never learn that greasers are treacherous. I know

Gene Stewart suspected something underhand. That's why he wanted us to hurry away. That's why he put me on this black horse of Don Carlos's. He wants that horse for himself, and feared the don would steal or shoot him."

"Well," said Stillwell, "let's all turn in again. Somebody'll ride over early an' tell us what's what."

Madeline awakened early, but not so early as the others, who were up and had breakfast ready when she went into the dining-room. Stillwell was not in an amiable frame of mind. He continually glanced at his watch, and growled because the cowboys were so late in riding over with the news. He gulped his breakfast; and while Madeline and the others ate theirs he tramped up and down the porch.

Madeline noted that Alfred grew nervous and restless. Presently he left the table to join Stillwell outside.

"They'll slope off to Don Carlos's rancho and leave us to ride home alone," observed Florence.

"Do you mind?" questioned Madeline.

"No, I don't exactly mind. We've got the fastest horses in this country. No, I don't mind, but I've no hankering for a situation which Gene Stewart thinks—"

Florence began disconnectedly and ended evasively. Madeline did not press the point, although she had some sense of misgiving. Stillwell tramped in, shaking the floor with his huge boots; Alfred followed him, carrying a field-glass.

"Not a hoss in sight," complained Stillwell. "Somethin' wrong over Don Carlos's way. Miss Majesty, it'll be jest as well fer you an Flo to hit the home trail. We can telephone over an' see that the boys know you're comin'."

Alfred, standing in the door, swept the gray valley with his field-glass.

"Bill, I see running stock-horses or cattle, I can't make out which. I guess we'd better rustle over there."

Both men hurried out. While the horses were being brought up and saddled, Madeline and Florence put away the breakfast dishes, then speedily donned spurs, sombreros, and gauntlets.

"Here are the horses, ready," called Alfred. "Flo, that black Mexican is a prince!"

The girls went out in time to hear Stillwell's good-by as he mounted and spurred away. Alfred went through the motions of

assisting Madeline and Florence to mount—which assistance they always flouted—and then he, too, swung up astride.

"I guess it's all right," he said rather dubiously. "You must not go toward Don Carlos's. It's only a few miles home."

"Sure, it's all right. We can ride, can't we?" retorted Florence. "Better have a care for yourself, going off over there to mix in goodness knows what."

Alfred said good-by, spurred his horse, and rode away.

"If Bill didn't forget to telephone!" exclaimed Florence. "I declare he and Al were sure rattled!"

Florence dismounted and went into the house. She left the door open. Madeline had some difficulty in holding Majesty.

It struck Madeline that Florence stayed rather long indoors. Presently she came out with sober face and rather tight lips.

"I couldn't get anybody on the phone. No answer. I tried a dozen times."

"Why, Florence!" Madeline was more concerned by the girl's looks than by the information she imparted.

"The wire's been cut," said Florence. Her gray glance swept swiftly after Alfred, who was now far out of ear-shot. "I don't like this a little bit. Heah's where I've got to 'figger,' as Bill says."

She pondered a moment, then hurried into the house, to return presently with the field-glass that Alfred had used. With this she took a survey of the valley, particularly in the direction of Madeline's ranch-house, which was hidden from view by low, rolling ridges.

"Anyway, nobody in that direction can see us leave heah," she mused. "There's mesquit on the ridges. We've got cover—long enough to save us till we can see what's ahead."

"Florence, what—what do you expect?" asked Madeline nervously.

"I don't know. There's never any telling about greasers. I wish Bill and Al hadn't left us. Still, come to think of that, they couldn't help us much in case of a chase. We'd run right away from them. Besides, they'd shoot. I guess I'm as well satisfied that we've got the job of getting home on our own hands. We don't dare follow Al toward Don Carlos's ranch. We know there's trouble over there; so all that's left is to hit the trail for home. Come, let's ride! You stick to me like a Spanish needle."

A heavy growth of mesquit covered the top of the first ridge, and the trail went through it. Florence took the lead, proceeding cautiously. As soon as she could see over the summit she used the field-glass; then she went on.

Madeline, following closely, saw down the slope of the ridge to a bare, wide, grassy hollow and onward to more rolling land, thick with cactus and mesquit. Florence appeared cautious, deliberate, yet she lost no time. She was ominously silent. Madeline's misgivings took definite shape in the fear of vaqueros in ambush.

Upon the ascent of the third ridge, which Madeline remembered was the last uneven ground between the point she had reached and her home, Florence exercised even greater care. Before she reached the top of this ridge she dismounted and looped her bridle round a dead snag. Motioning Madeline to wait, she slipped ahead through the mesquit out of sight.

Madeline waited anxiously, listening and watching. She could not see or hear anything alarming. The sun began to have a touch of heat; the morning breeze rustled the thin mesquit foliage; the deep magenta of a cactus flower caught her eye; a long-tailed, cruel-beaked bird sailed so close to her that she could have touched it with her whip. But she was only vaguely aware of these things. She was watching for Florence, listening for some sound fraught with untoward meaning.

All of a sudden she saw that Majesty's ears were held straight up. Then Florence's face, now strangely white, showed round the turn of the trail.

"S-sh!" whispered Florence, holding up a warning finger. She reached the black horse and petted him, evidently to still the slight uneasiness he manifested. "We're in for it," she went on. "A whole bunch of vaqueros hiding among the mesquit over the ridge! They've not seen or heard us yet. We'd better risk riding ahead, cut off the trail, and beat them to the ranch. Madeline, you're white as death! Don't faint now!"

"I shall not faint. But—you frighten me. Is there danger? What shall we do?"

"There's danger. Madeline, I wouldn't deceive you," went on Florence in an earnest whisper. "Things have turned out just as Gene Stewart hinted. Oh, we should—Al should have listened to Gene! I believe—I'm afraid Gene *knew*!"

"Knew what?" asked Madeline.

"Never mind now. Listen. We daren't take the back trail. We'll go on. I've a scheme to fool that grinning Don Carlos. Get down, Madeline—hurry!" Madeline dismounted. "Give me your white sweater. Take it off—and that white hat. Hurry, Madeline!"

"Florence, what on earth do you mean?" cried Madeline.

"Not so loud," whispered the other. Her gray eyes snapped. She had divested herself of sombrero and jacket, which she held out to Madeline. "Heah, take these. Give me yours. Then get up on the roan. I'll ride Majesty. Rustle now, Madeline. This is no time to talk."

"But, dear—why, why do you—ah, you're going to make the vaqueros take you for me!"

"You guessed it. Will you—"

"I shall not allow you to do anything of the kind," returned Madeline.

It was then that Florence's face, changing, took on the hard, stern sharpness so typical of a cowboy's. Madeline had caught glimpses of that expression in Alfred's face, and on Stewart's when he was silent, and on Stillwell's always. It was a look of iron and fire—unchangeable, unquenchable will. There was even violence in the swift action whereby Florence compelled Madeline to the change of apparel.

"It was my idea, anyhow, if Stewart hadn't told me to do it," said Florence, her words as swift as her hands. "Don Carlos is after you, you—*Miss Madeline Hammond*! He wouldn't ambush a trail for any one else. He's not killing cowboys these days. He wants you for some reason. So Gene thought, and now I believe him. Well, we'll know for sure in five minutes. You ride the black; I'll ride Majesty. We'll slip round through the brush, out of sight and sound, till we can break out into the open. Then we'll split. You make straight for the ranch; I'll cut loose for the valley where Gene said positively the cowboys were with the cattle. The vaqueros will take me for you. They all know those white things you wear. They'll chase me, but they'll never get anywhere near me. You'll be on a fast horse. He can take you home ahead of any vaqueros. But you won't be chased! I'm staking all on that. Trust me, Madeline!"

Madeline felt herself forced rather than persuaded into acquiescence. She mounted

the black and took up the bridle. In another moment she was guiding her horse off the trail in the tracks of Majesty.

Florence led off at right angles, threading a slow passage through the mesquit. She favored sandy patches and open aisles between the trees, and was careful not to break a branch. Often she stopped to listen.

This *détour* of perhaps half a mile brought Madeline to where she could see open ground, the ranch-house only a few miles off, and the cattle dotting the valley. She had not lost her courage, but it was certain that these familiar sights somewhat lightened the pressure upon her breast. Excitement gripped her.

The shrill whistle of a horse made both the black and Majesty jump. Florence quickened the gait down the slope. Soon Madeline saw the edge of the brush, the gray, bleached grass, and level ground.

Florence waited at an opening between the low trees. She gave Madeline a quick, bright glance.

"All over but the ride! That'll sure be easy. Bolt now, and keep your nerve!"

When Florence wheeled the fiery roan and screamed in his ear, the big horse leaped into thundering action. Florence's hair streamed on the wind and shone gold in the sunlight; and at the sight, Madeline felt the same thrill with which she had seen Bonita's flying dark hair on the wild night ride.

Madeline spurred the black into the open, loosened the reins, and laid them upon his neck. His action was strange to her. He was hard to ride; but he was fast, and she cared for nothing else. Madeline knew horses well enough to realize that he had found he was free and carrying a light weight. A few times she took up the bridle and pulled to right or left, trying to guide him. He kept a straight course, however, crashing through small patches of mesquit and jumping the cracks and washes.

Madeline listened for the pound of pursuing hoofs in her rear. Involuntarily she glanced back. On the mile or more of gray level between her and the ridge there was not a horse, a man, or anything living.

She wheeled to look back on the other side, down the valley slope. The sight of Florence riding Majesty in zigzag flight before a whole troop of vaqueros blanched her cheek and made her grip the pommel of her saddle in a reeling terror.

That strange gait of her roan was not his wonderful stride! Could Majesty be running wild? Madeline saw one vaquero draw closer, whirling his lasso round his head, but he did not get near enough to throw. Another vaquero swept across in front of the first one. Then, when Madeline gasped in breathless expectancy, the roan swerved to elude the attack.

It flashed over Madeline that Florence was putting the horse to some such awkward flight as might have been expected of an Eastern girl frightened out of her wits. She made sure of this when she saw that Florence, in spite of the horse's breaking gait and the irregular course, was drawing slowly and surely down the valley.

Presently, when she turned again to watch Florence, uncertainty ceased. Majesty was in his beautiful stride, low down along the ground, stretching, with his nose level and straight for the valley. Between him and the lean horses in pursuit lay an ever-increasing space. He was running away from the vaqueros. Florence was indeed "riding the wind," as Stewart had aptly expressed his idea of flight upon the fleet roan.

A dimness came over Madeline's eyes, and it was not all owing to the sting of the wind. She rubbed it away, seeing Florence as a flying dot in a strange blur. What a daring, intrepid girl! This kind of strength—aye, and splendid thought for a weaker sister—was what the West inculcated in a woman.

The next time Madeline looked back Florence was far ahead of her pursuers, and going out of sight behind a low knoll. Assured of her safety, Madeline put her mind to her own ride and the possibilities awaiting at the ranch. She remembered the failure to get any of her servants or cowboys on the telephone. She rode on, pulling the black as she neared the ranch. Her approach was from the south and off the usual trail, so that she went up the long slope of the knoll toward the back of the house. Under these circumstances she could not consider it out of the ordinary that she did not see any one about the grounds.

It was perhaps fortunate for her, she thought, that the climb up the slope cut the black's speed so that she could manage him. He was not very hard to stop. The moment she dismounted, however, he jumped and trotted off. At the edge of the

slope, facing the corrals, he halted to lift his head and shoot up his ears. Then he let out a piercing whistle and dashed down the lane.

Madeline, prepared by that warning whistle, tried to fortify herself for some new and unexpected situation; but, as she espied an unfamiliar company of horsemen rapidly riding down a hollow leading from the foot-hills, she felt fear gripping at her like cold hands, and fled precipitately into the house.

XVIII

MADeline bolted the door, and, flying into the kitchen, told the frightened servants to shut themselves in. Then she ran to her own rooms. It took her only a few moments to close and bar the heavy shutters; yet even as she was fastening the last one in the room she used as an office, a clattering roar of hoofs seemed to swell up to the front of the house.

She caught a glimpse of wild, shaggy horses and ragged, dusty men. She had never seen any vaqueros that resembled these horsemen. Vaqueros had grace and style; they were fond of lace and glitter and fringe; they dressed their horses in silvered trappings. But the riders now trampling into the driveway were uncouth, lean, savage. They were guerrillas, a band of the raiders who had been harassing the border since the beginning of the revolution. A second glimpse assured Madeline that they were not all Mexicans.

The presence of outlaws in the band brought home to Madeline her real danger. She remembered what Stillwell had told her about the troubles along the Rio Grande. These flying bands, operating under the excitement of the revolution, appeared here and there in remote places, and were gone as quickly as they came. Generally they wanted money and arms, but they would steal anything, and unprotected women had suffered at their hands.

Madeline, hurriedly collecting some money and securities that she had in her desk, ran out, closed and locked the door, and crossed the *patio* to the opposite side of the house. She went down a long corridor, trying to decide which of the many unused rooms would be best to hide in. Before she made up her mind she came to the last room.

Just then a battering on door or window in the direction of the kitchen, and shrill

screams from the servant women, increased her alarm. She entered the last room. There was no lock or bar upon the door; but the room was large and dark, and it was half full of bales of alfalfa hay. Probably it was the safest place in the house; at least, time would be necessary to find any one hidden there.

She dropped her valuables in a dark corner and covered them with loose hay. That done, she felt her way down a narrow aisle between the piled-up bales, and presently crouched in a niche.

With the necessity of action over for the immediate present, she listened, waiting, hoping, yet dreading to hear the clattering approach of her cowboys. There would be fighting—blood—men injured, perhaps killed.

Hours seemed to pass while she crouched there. Had Florence been overtaken? Could any of those lean horses outrun Majesty? She doubted it; she knew it could not be true. Nevertheless the strain of uncertainty was torturing.

Suddenly the bang of the corridor door pierced her through and through with a new alarm. Some of the guerrillas had entered the east wing of the house. She heard a babel of jabbering voices, the shuffling of boots and clinking of spurs, the slamming of doors and ransacking of rooms.

Madeline lost faith in her hiding-place. The idea of being caught in that dark room by those ruffians filled her with horror. She must get out into the light!

Swiftly she rose and went to the window. It was more of a door than a window, being a large aperture closed by two wooden doors on hinges. The iron hook yielded readily to her grasp; one door stuck fast, while the other opened a few inches. She looked out upon a green slope covered with flowers and bunches of sage and bushes. Neither man nor horse showed in the narrow field of her vision.

She believed she would be safer hidden out there in the shrubbery than in the house. The jump from the window would be easy for her; and with her quick decision came a rush and stir of spirit that warded off her weakness.

The tramping of heavy feet on the floor of the adjoining room lent her the last strength of fear. Pushing with hands and shoulders, she moved the door far enough to permit the passage of her body. Then she

stepped up on the sill and slipped through the aperture.

She saw no one. Lightly she jumped down and ran in among the bushes; but these did not afford her the cover she needed. She stole from one clump to another, finding too late that she had chosen with poor judgment. The position of the bushes had drawn her closer to the front of the house rather than away from it. Just before her were horses, and beyond a group of excited men. She crouched down, with her heart in her throat.

A shrill yell, followed by the sight of guerrillas running and mounting, roused her hope. They had sighted the cowboys and were in flight. Rapid thumping of boots on the porch told of men hurrying from the house. Several horses dashed past her, not ten feet distant. One rider saw her, for he turned to shout back.

This drove Madeline into a panic. Hardly knowing what she did, she began to run away from the house. Her feet seemed leaden. She felt the same horrible powerlessness that sometimes came over her when she dreamed of being pursued. Horses with shouting riders streaked past her in the shrubbery. There was a thunder of hoofs behind her. She turned aside, but the thundering grew nearer. She was being run down.

As Madeline shut her eyes and, staggering, was about to fall under pounding hoofs, a powerful hand grasped her around the waist, clutched deep, and swung her aloft. She felt a heavy blow when the shoulder of the horse struck her, and then a wrenching of her arm as she was dragged up. The pain of it made sight and feeling fade from her; but she was still sufficiently conscious to know that she was being rapidly borne away.

When her faculties began to return, the motion of the horse was no longer violent. For a few moments she could not determine her position. Apparently she was upside down. Then she saw that she was facing the ground, and must be lying across a saddle with her head hanging down.

She could not move a hand; she could not tell where her hands were. Then she felt the touch of soft leather. She saw a high-topped Mexican boot, a huge silver spur, the reeking flank and legs of a horse, and a dusty, narrow trail. Soon a kind of red darkness veiled her eyes; her head swam; and she felt pain only dully.

After what seemed a thousand weary hours some one lifted her from the horse and laid her upon the ground, where gradually, as the blood left her head, and she could see, she began to get the right relation of things.

She lay in a sparse grove of firs, where the shadows told of late afternoon. She smelled wood smoke, and she heard the sharp crunch of horses' teeth nipping grass. Voices caused her to turn her face. A group of men stood and sat round a campfire, eating like wolves. The looks of her captors made Madeline close her eyes; but the fascination, the fear they roused in her, made her open them again.

Most of the men were thin-bodied, thin-bearded Mexicans, black and haggard and starved. Whatever they might be, they surely were hunger-stricken and squalid. Not one had a coat. A few had scarfs. Some wore belts in which were scattered cartridges. Only a few had guns, and these were of diverse patterns.

Madeline could see no packs, no blankets, and only a few cooking utensils, all battered and blackened. Her eyes fastened upon men whom she believed to be white men, but it was from their features and not their color that she judged. Once she had seen a band of nomad robbers in the Sahara, and somehow she was reminded of them by this motley outlaw troop.

They divided their attention between the satisfying of ravenous appetites and a vigilant watching down the forest aisles. They expected some one, Madeline thought, but she could not tell whether it was an allied band or a pursuing posse. She could not understand more than a word here and there that they uttered. Presently, however, the name of Don Carlos revived a realization of her situation, and once more dread possessed her breast.

A low exclamation and a sweep of arm from one of the guerrillas caused the whole band to wheel and concentrate their attention in the opposite direction. They heard something. They saw some one. Grimy hands sought weapons. Madeline closed her eyes, sick with what she saw, fearful of the moment when the guns would leap out.

There were muttered curses, a short period of silence, followed by whisperings, and then a clear voice rang out:

"El Capitan!"

A strong shock vibrated through Madeline, and her eyelids swept open. She as-

sociated the name "*El Capitan*" with Stewart, and she experienced a sensation of strange regret. It was not pursuit or rescue she thought of then, but death. These men would kill Stewart.

But surely he had not come alone! The lean, dark faces, corded and rigid, told her in what direction to look. She heard the slow, heavy thump of hoofs. Soon into the wide aisle between the trees moved the form of a man, his arms flung high over his head. Then Madeline saw the horse and recognized Majesty, and she knew it was really Stewart who rode the roan. When doubt was no longer possible, she felt a suffocating sense of gladness and fear and wonder.

Many of the guerrillas leaped up with drawn weapons. Still Stewart approached with his hands high, and rode right into the camp-fire circle. Then a guerrilla, evidently the chief, waved down the threatening men, strode up to Stewart, and greeted him. There seemed to be amazement and pleasure and respect in the greeting. Madeline could tell that, though she did not know what was said.

Stewart appeared as cool and careless as if he were dismounting at her porch steps; but when he got down she saw that his face was white. He shook hands with the guerrilla, and then his glittering eyes roved over the men and around the glade until they rested upon Madeline. Without moving from his tracks, he seemed to leap, as if a powerful current had shocked him. Madeline tried to smile to assure him she was alive and well, but the intent in his eyes, the power of his controlled spirit, telling her of her peril and his, froze the smile on her lips.

With that he faced the chief and spoke rapidly in the Mexican jargon which Madeline had always found so difficult to translate. The chief answered, spreading wide his hands, one of which indicated Madeline as she lay there. Stewart drew the fellow aside and said something for his ear alone. The chief's hands swept up, in a gesture of surprise and acquiescence.

Again Stewart spoke swiftly. His hearer then turned to address the band. Madeline caught the words "*Don Carlos*" and "*pesos*." There was a brief muttering protest, which the chief thundered down. Madeline guessed her release had been given by this guerrilla and bought from the others of the band.

Stewart strode to her side, leading the roan. Majesty reared and snorted when he saw his mistress prostrate. Stewart knelt, still holding the bridle.

"Are you—all right?" he asked.

"I think so," she replied, essaying a laugh that was rather a failure. "My feet are tied."

Dark blood blotted out all the white from Stewart's face, and lightning shot from his eyes. She felt his hands loosening the bonds round her ankles. Without a word he lifted her upright and then upon Majesty. Madeline reeled a little in the saddle, held hard to the pommel with one hand, and tried to lean on Stewart's shoulder with the other.

"Don't give up!" he said.

She saw him gaze furtively into the forest on all sides; and it surprised her to see the guerrillas riding away. Putting the two facts together, Madeline formed an idea that neither Stewart nor the others desired to meet with some one who would shortly arrive in the glade.

Stewart guided the roan off to the right and walked beside Madeline, steadying her in the saddle. At first she was so weak and dizzy that she could scarcely retain her seat. The dizziness left her presently, and then she made an effort to ride without help. Her weakness, however, and a pain in her wrenched arm, made the task laborious.

Stewart had struck off the trail, if there were one, and was keeping to denser parts of the forest. The sun sank low, and the shafts of gold fell with a long slant among the firs. Majesty's hoofs made no sound on the soft ground, and Stewart strode on without speaking.

Neither his hurry nor his vigilance relaxed until at least two miles had been covered. Then he held to a straighter course, and did not send so many glances into the darkening woods.

The level of the forest began to be cut up by little hollows, all of which sloped and widened. Presently the soft ground gave place to bare, rocky soil. The horse snorted and tossed his head. A sound of splashing water broke the silence. The hollow opened into a wider one, through which a little brook murmured its way over the stones. Majesty snorted again and stopped and bent his head.

"He wants a drink," said Madeline. "I'm thirsty, too, and very tired!"

Stewart lifted her out of the saddle and, as their hands parted, she felt something moist and warm. Blood was running down her arm and into the palm of her hand.

"I'm—bleeding," she said a little unsteadily. "Oh, I remember—my arm was hurt."

She held it out, the blood making her conscious of her weakness. Stewart's fingers felt so firm and sure. Swiftly he ripped the wet sleeve. Her forearm had been cut or scratched. He washed off the blood.

"Why, Stewart, it's nothing! I was only a little nervous. I'm not used to seeing my own blood."

He made no reply as he tore her handkerchief into strips and bound her arm. His swift motions and his silence gave her a hint of how he might meet a more serious emergency. She felt safe; and because of that impression she was surprised when he lifted his head and she saw that he was pale and shaking. He stood before her folding his scarf, which was still wet, and from which he made no effort to remove the red stains.

"Miss Hammond," he said hoarsely, "it was a man's hands—a greaser's fingernails—that cut your arm. I know who he was. I could have killed him; but I mightn't have got your freedom. You understand? I didn't dare!"

Madeline gazed at Stewart, astounded more by his speech than his excessive emotion.

"My dear boy!" she exclaimed; and then she paused. She could not find words.

He was making an apology to her for not killing a man who had laid a rough hand upon her person. He was humble and ashamed and seemed to be in a torture of fear that she would not understand why he had spared the man.

"Stewart, I understand. You were being my kind of cowboy. I thank you!"

But she did not wholly understand. She had heard many stories of this man's cool indifference to peril and death. He had always seemed as hard as granite. Why should the sight of a little blood upon her arm pale his cheek and shake his hand and thicken his voice? What was there in his nature to make him implore her to see the only reason he could not kill an outlaw?

The answer to the first question was that he loved her. It was beyond her to an-

swer the second; but the secret of it lay in the same strength from which his love sprang—an intensity of feeling which seemed characteristic of these Western men of simple, lonely, elemental lives. Madeline's Eastern lovers, who had the graces that made them her equal in the sight of the world, were without the one great essential that a lonely, hard life had given to Stewart. Nature here struck a just balance.

Something deep and dim in the future, an unknown voice, called to Madeline and disturbed her; but because it did not call to her intelligence she deadened the ears of her warm and throbbing life and decided never to listen.

"Is it safe to rest a little?" she asked. "I am so tired. Perhaps I'll be stronger if I rest."

"We're all right now," he said. "The horse will be better, too. I ran him out, and up hill at that."

"Where are we?"

"Up in the mountains, ten miles and more from the ranch. There's a trail just below here. I can get you home by midnight. They'll be worried down there."

"What happened?"

"Nothing much to any one but you. That's the—the hard luck of it. Florence caught us out on the slope. We were coming back from the fire. We were dead beat; but we got to the ranch before any damage was done. We sure had trouble in finding a trace of you, till Nick spotted the prints of your heels under the window, and then we knew. I had to fight the boys. If they'd come after you we'd never have got you without a fight. I didn't want that. Old Bill came out packing a dozen guns. He was crazy. I had to rope Monty. Honest, I tied him to the porch. Nels and Nick promised to stay and hold him till morning. That was the best I could do. I was sure lucky to come up with the band so soon. I had figured right. I knew that guerrilla chief. He's a bandit in Mexico. It's a business with him; but he fought for Madero, and I was with him a good deal. He may be a greaser, but he's white."

"How did you effect my release?"

"I offered them money. That's what the rebels all want. They need money. They're a lot of poor, hungry devils."

"I gathered that you offered to pay ransom. How much?"

"Two thousand dollars Mex. I gave my word, and I'll have to take the money. I told them when and where I'd meet them."

"Certainly. I'm glad I've got the money." Madeline laughed. "What a strange thing to happen to me! I wonder what dad would say to that. Stewart, I'm afraid he'd say two thousand dollars is more than I'm worth. But tell me—that rebel chieftain did not demand money?"

"No. The money is for his men."

"What did you say to him? I saw you whisper in his ear."

Stewart dropped his head, averting her direct gaze.

"We were comrades before Juarez. One day I dragged him out of a ditch. I reminded him. Then I—I told him something I—I thought—"

"Stewart, I know, from the way he looked at me, that you spoke of me."

Her companion did not offer a reply to this, and Madeline did not press the point.

"I heard Don Carlos's name several times. That interests me. What have Don Carlos and his vaqueros to do with this?"

"That greaser has all to do with it," replied Stewart grimly. "He burned his ranch and corrals to keep us from getting them; but he also did it to draw all the boys away from your home. They had a deep plot, all right. I left orders for some one to stay with you, but Al and Stillwell, who're both hot-headed, rode off this morning. Then the guerrillas came down."

"Well, what was the idea—the plot, as you call it?"

"To get you," he said bluntly.

"Me! Stewart, you do not mean that my capture—whatever you call it—was anything more than mere accident?"

"I reckon I do mean that; but Stillwell and your brother think the guerrillas wanted money and arms, and just happened to make off with you because you ran under a horse's nose."

"You do not incline to that point of view?"

"I sure don't. Neither does Nels or Nick Steele; and we know Don Carlos and the greasers. Look how the vaqueros chased Flo for you!"

"What do you think, then?"

"I'd rather not say."

"But, Stewart, I would like to know. If it is about me, surely I ought to know," protested Madeline. "What reason have

Nels and Nick to suspect Don Carlos of plotting to abduct me?"

"I reckon they've no reason that you'd take. Once I heard Nels say he'd seen the greaser look at you, and if he ever saw him do it again he'd shoot him."

"Why, Stewart, that is ridiculous. To shoot a man for looking at a woman! This is a civilized country."

"Well, maybe it would be ridiculous in a civilized country. I reckon there's some things about civilization I don't care for."

"What, for instance?"

"For one thing, I can't stand for the way men let other men treat women. It was bad in Kansas City and worse in St. Louis. I reckon I couldn't live in New York."

"But, Stewart, what strange talk from you, who, that night I came—"

She broke off, sorry that she had spoken. His shame was not pleasant to see. Suddenly he lifted his head, and she felt scorched by flaming eyes.

"Suppose I was drunk. Suppose I had met some ordinary girl. Suppose I had really made her marry me. Don't you think I would have stopped being a drunkard and have been good to her?"

"Stewart, I do not know what to think about you," replied Madeline.

There followed a short silence. Madeline saw the last bright rays of the setting sun slide up over a distant crag. Stewart rebriddled the horse and looked at the saddle-girths.

"I reckon I'm awkward in talking. I got off the trail. About Don Carlos, I'll say right out not what Nels and Nick think, but what I know. Don Carlos hoped to make off with you for himself, the same as if you had been a poor peon slave-girl down in Sonora. Maybe he had a deeper plot than my rebel friend told me. Maybe he even went so far as to hope for American troops to chase him. The rebels are trying to stir up the United States. They'd welcome intervention. However that may be, the greaser meant evil to you, and has meant it ever since he saw you first. That's all!"

For several moments Madeline made no reply. Then she said slowly:

"Stewart, you have done me and my family a service we can never hope to repay."

"I reckon I've done the service; only don't mention pay to me. But there's one

thing I'd like you to know, and I find it hard to say. It's prompted, maybe, by what I know you think of me, and what I imagine your family and friends would think, if they knew. It's not prompted by pride or conceit. It's this—such a woman as you should never have come to this God-forsaken country, unless she meant to forget herself. But as you *did* come, and as you *were* dragged away by those devils, I want you to know that all your wealth and position and influence—all that power behind you—would never have saved you from hell to-night. Only such a man as Nels or Nick Steele or I could have done that."

Madeline Hammond felt the great leveling force of the truth. Whatever the difference between her and Stewart, or whatever the imagined difference set up by false standards of class and culture, the truth was that here on this wild mountainside she was only a woman and he was simply a man.

"I reckon we'd better start now," he said, and drew the horse close to a large rock. "Come!"

Madeline's will greatly exceeded her strength. For the first time she acknowledged to herself that she had been hurt. Still, she did not feel much pain except when she moved her shoulder. Once in the saddle, where Stewart lifted her, she drooped weakly. The way was rough; every step the horse took hurt her; and the slope of the ground threw her forward on the pommel. Presently, as the slope grew rockier, and her discomfort increased, she forgot everything except that she was suffering.

"Here is the trail," said Stewart at length.

Not far from that point Madeline swayed, and, but for Stewart's support, would have fallen from the saddle. She heard him swear under his breath.

"Here, this won't do," he said. "Throw your leg over the pommel. The other one—there!"

Then, mounting, he slipped behind her and lifted and turned her, and then held her with his left arm so that she lay across the saddle and his knees, her head against his shoulder.

As the horse started into a rapid walk, Madeline let herself go and lay inert. For a little while she seemed to be half drunk with the gentle swaying of a hammock.

Her mind became at once dreamy and active, as if it thoughtfully recorded the slow, soft impressions pouring in from all her senses.

A red glow faded in the west. She could see out over the foot-hills, where twilight was settling gray on the crests, dark in the hollows. Cedar and piñon trees lined the trail, and there were no more firs. At intervals huge drab-colored rocks loomed over her. The sky was clear and steely. A faint star twinkled. And lastly, close to her, she saw Stewart's face, once more dark and impassive, with the inscrutable eyes ever fixed on the trail.

He held her as easily as if she had been a child. The roughness of his flannel shirt rubbed her cheek, and beneath that she felt the dampness of the scarf he had used to bathe her arm, and, deeper still, the regular pound of his heart. Against her ear, filling it with strong, vibrant beat, his heart seemed a mighty engine deep within a great cavern.

Her head had never before rested on a man's breast, and she had no liking for it there; but she felt more than the physical contact. The position was mysterious and fascinating, and something natural in it made her think of life.

As the cool wind blew down from the heights, loosening her tumbled hair, she was compelled to see strands of it curl softly into Stewart's face, before his eyes, across his lips. She was unable to reach it with her free hand, and therefore could not refasten it. And when she shut her eyes she felt those loosened strands playing against his cheeks.

In the keener press of such sensations she caught the smell of dust and a faint, wild, sweet tang on the air. There was a low rustling sigh of wind in the brush along the trail. Suddenly the silence ripped apart to the sharp bark of a coyote, and then, from far away, came a long wail. And Majesty's metal-rimmed hoof rang on a stone.

She opened her eyes and found that night had fallen. The sky was a dark, velvety blue blazing with white stars. The cool wind tugged at her hair, and through waving strands she saw Stewart's profile, bold and sharp against the sky.

Then, as her mind succumbed to her bodily fatigue, again her situation became unreal and wild. A heavy languor began to steal upon her. She wavered and drift-

ed. With the last half-conscious sense of a muffled throb at her ear, a something intangibly sweet, deep-toned, and strange, like a distant calling bell, she fell asleep with her head on Stewart's breast.

XIX

THREE days after her return to the ranch Madeline could not discover any physical discomfort as a reminder of her adventurous experiences. This surprised her, but not nearly so much as the fact that after a few weeks she found she scarcely remembered the adventures at all. If it had not been for the quiet and persistent guardianship of her cowboys she might almost have forgotten Don Carlos and the raiders.

Madeline was assured of the splendid physical fitness to which this ranch life had developed her, and felt that she was assimilating something of the Western disregard of danger. A hard ride, an accident, a day in the sun and dust, an adventure with outlaws—these might once have been matters of large import, but now for Madeline they were in order with all the rest of her changed life.

There was never a day that something interesting was not brought to her notice. Stillwell, who had ceaselessly reproached himself for riding away the morning Madeline was captured, grew more like an anxious parent than a faithful superintendent. He was never at ease regarding her unless he was near the ranch or had left Stewart there, or else Nels and Nick Steele. Naturally he trusted more to Stewart than to any one else.

"Miss Majesty, it's sure amazin' strange about Gene," said the old cattleman as he tramped into Madeline's office.

"What's the matter now?" she inquired.

"Wal, Gene has rustled off up into the mountains again."

"Again? I did not know that he had gone. I gave him money for that band of guerrillas, and perhaps he went to take it to them."

"No. He took that a day or so after he fetched you back home. Then in about a week he went a second time, an' he packed some stuff with him. Now he's sneaked off, an' Nels, who was down to the lower trail, saw him meet somebody that looked like Padre Marcos. I went down to the church, an' sure enough Padre Marcos is gone. What do you think of that, Miss Majesty?"

"Perhaps Stewart is getting religious," laughed Madeline. "You told me so once."

Stillwell puffed and wiped his red face.

"If you'd heerd him cuss Monty this mawnin' you'd never guess it was religion. Monty an' Nels hev been givin' Gene a lot of trouble lately. They're both sore an' in fightin' mood ever since Don Carlos hed you kidnaped. They're goin' to break loose soon, an' then we'll hev a couple of wild Texas steers ridin' the range; but it's Gene I'm most worried about."

"What do you fear?"

"I think he's found Danny Mains up in the mountains, an' has taken Padre Marcos up there to try to persuade Danny to come back."

"If that is true, it is nothing to worry about. I think that very creditable to Stewart."

"Wal, Miss Majesty, I sure wasn't discreditin' Gene none," replied Stillwell reproachfully. "What I'm worryin' over is no *padre* could persuade that blamed little cow-puncher."

"Stillwell, your feelings are hurt. You care a good deal for Danny, and you can't believe he ever stole that money. And now you are worrying because you are afraid what you hope will not come true. Isn't that it?"

"I reckon you've hit it!"

"Then keep on hoping and believing, but stop worrying. Surely a man that you've such faith in must somehow be worthy of it. Just wait. Let Stewart take his mysterious trips up into the mountains. Meanwhile, I have news for you that may give you reason for worry. I have letters from home. My sister, with a party of friends, is coming out to visit me. They are society people, and one of them is an English lord."

"Wal, Miss Majesty, I reckon we'll all be glad to see them," said Stillwell. "Onless they pack you off back East."

"That isn't likely," replied Madeline thoughtfully. "I must go back some time, though. Well, let me read you a few extracts from my mail."

Madeline took up her sister's letter with a strange sensation. How easily the sight of a crested monogram and the scent of delicately perfumed paper could recall the life she had given up! Helen's letter was in turn gay and brilliant and lazy, just as she was herself, but Madeline detected

more of curiosity in it than of real longing to see the sister and brother in the far West. Much of what Helen wrote was enthusiastic anticipation of the fun she expected to have with bashful cowboys.

Helen seldom wrote letters, and she never read anything, not even the popular novels of the day. She was as absolutely ignorant of the West as the Englishman who, she said, expected to hunt buffalo and fight Indians. Moreover, there was a satiric note in the letter that Madeline did not wholly like. Manifestly Helen was reveling in the prospect of new sensations.

When she finished reading aloud a few paragraphs, the old cattleman snorted and his face grew redder.

"Did your sister write that?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Wal, I—I beg pawdin, Miss Majesty, but it doesn't seem like you. Does she think we're a lot of wild men from Borneo?"

"Evidently she does. I rather think she is in for a surprise. Now, Stillwell, you are clever, and you can see the situation. I want my guests to enjoy their stay here, but I do not want it to be at the expense of the feelings of all of us, or even any one. Helen will bring a lively crowd. They'll crave excitement. Let us see that they are not disappointed. You take the boys into your confidence. I don't care what they do, what measures they take to protect themselves, what tricks they contrive, so long as they do not overstep the limit of kindness and courtesy. My guests expect to have fun. Let us meet them with fun. Now, what do you say?"

Stillwell rose, his great bulk towering, his huge face beaming.

"Wal, I say it's the most amazin' fine idee I ever heerd in my life!"

"Very well," replied Madeline; "we will consider it settled. My guests will arrive on the 9th of May. Meanwhile let us get Her Majesty's Rancho in shape for the invasion."

On the afternoon of the 9th of May, perhaps half an hour after Madeline had received a telephone-message from Link Stevens announcing the arrival of her guests at El Cajon, Florence called her out upon the porch. Stillwell was there with his face wrinkled by his wonderful smile and his eagle eyes riveted upon the distant valley. Far away, perhaps twenty miles, a

thin streak of white dust rose from the valley floor and slanted skyward.

"Look!" said Florence excitedly.

"What is that?" asked Madeline.

"Why, it's Link Stevens coming with the automobile!"

"Oh, no. Why, it's only a few minutes since he telephoned saying the party had just arrived."

"Take a look with the glasses," said Florence.

One glance through the powerful binoculars convinced Madeline that Florence was right, and another glance at Stillwell told her that he was speechless with delight. She remembered a conversation she had had with Link Stevens a day or two before.

"Stevens, I hope the car is in good shape," she had said.

"Now, Miss Hammond, she's as right as the best-trained hoss I ever rode," he had replied.

"The valley road is perfect," she had gone on musingly. "I never saw such a beautiful road, even in France. No fences, no ditches, no rocks, no vehicles—just a lonely road on the desert."

"Shore, it's lonely," Stevens had answered with slowly brightening eyes; "an' safe, Miss Hammond."

"My sister used to like fast riding. If I remember correctly, all of my guests were a little afflicted with the speed mania. It is a common disease with New Yorkers. I hope, Stevens, that you will not give them reason to think we are altogether steeped in the slow, dreamy, *mañana* languor of the Southwest?"

Link eyed her doubtfully, and then his bronze face changed its dark aspect and seemed to shine.

"Beggin' your pardon, Miss Hammond, thet's shore tall talk fer Link Stevens to savvy! You mean, as long as I drive careful an' safe I can run away from my dust, so to say, an' get here in somethin' less than the greaser's to-morrow?"

Madeline had laughed her assent. And now, as she watched the thin streak of dust, she reproached herself. She trusted Stevens; she had never known so skilful, daring, and iron-nerved a driver as he was; if she had been in the car herself she would have had no anxiety. But imagining what Stevens would do on forty miles and more of that desert road, Madeline suffered a prick of conscience.

"Wal, as Nels says, I wouldn't be in that there ottomobile right now for a million pesos!" remarked Stillwell.

"Is Stevens driving very fast?" Madeline asked anxiously.

"Fast? Miss Majesty, there hain't ever been anythin' except a streak of lightnin' run so fast in this country. I can jest see Link now, the crooked-legged little feller, hunchin' down over that wheel as if it was a hoss's neck!"

"I told him not to let the ride be hot or dusty," remarked Madeline.

"Haw! Haw!" roared Stillwell. "Wal, I'll be goin'. I reckon I'd like to be hyah when Link drives up, but I want to be with the boys down by the bunks. It'll be some fun to see Nels an' Monty when Link comes flyin' along."

"I wish Al had stayed to meet them," said Madeline.

Her brother had rather hurried a shipment of cattle to California; and it was Madeline's supposition that he had welcomed the opportunity to absent himself from the ranch.

"I am sorry he wouldn't stay," replied Florence; "but Al's all business now, and he's doing finely. It's just as well, perhaps."

"Surely. That was my pride speaking. I would like to have all my family and all my old friends see what a man Al has become. Well, Link Stevens is running like the wind. The car will be here before we know it. Florence, we've only a few moments to dress; but first I want to order many and various and exceedingly cold refreshments for that approaching party."

Less than a half-hour later Madeline went again to the porch and found Florence there.

"Oh, you look just lovely!" exclaimed Florence impulsively, as she gazed wide-eyed at Madeline; "and somehow so different!"

Madeline smiled a little sadly. Perhaps, when she had put on that exquisite white gown, something had come to her of the manner which befitted the wearing of it. She could not resist the desire to look fair once more in the eyes of these hypercritical friends. She knew that what society had once been pleased to call her beauty had trebled since it had last been seen in a drawing-room.

Madeline wore no jewels, but at her waist she had pinned two great crimson

roses. Against the dead white they had the life and fire and redness of the desert.

"Link's hit the old round-up trail," said Florence, "and, oh, isn't he riding that car!"

With Florence, as with most of the cowboys, the car was never driven, but ridden.

A white spot with a long tail of dust showed low down in the valley. It was now headed almost straight for the ranch. Madeline watched it growing larger moment by moment, and her pleasurable emotion grew accordingly. Then the rapid beat of a horse's hoofs caused her to turn.

Stewart was riding in on his black horse. He had been absent on an important mission, and his duty had taken him to the international boundary-line. His presence home long before he was expected was particularly gratifying to Madeline, for it meant that his mission had been brought to a successful issue. Once more, for the hundredth time, the man's efficiency struck Madeline. He was a doer of things.

The black horse halted wearily without the usual pound of hoofs on the gravel, and the dusty rider dismounted wearily. Both horse and rider showed the heat and dust and wind of many miles.

Madeline advanced to the porch steps, and Stewart, after taking a parcel of papers from a saddle-bag, turned toward her.

"Stewart, you are the best of couriers," she said. "I am pleased."

Dust streamed from his sombrero as he doffed it. His dark face seemed to rise as he straightened his weary shoulders.

"Here are the reports, Miss Hammond," he replied.

As he looked up to see her standing there, dressed to receive her Eastern guests, he checked his advance with a violent action which recalled to Madeline the one he had made on the night she had met him, when she disclosed her identity. It was not fear or embarrassment or awkwardness. It was only momentary; yet, slight as had been his pause, Madeline received from it an impression of some strong halting force. A man struck by a bullet might have had an instant jerk of muscular control such as convulsed Stewart.

In that instant, as her keen gaze searched his dust-caked face, she met the full, free look of his eyes. Her own did not fall, though she felt a warmth steal to her cheeks. Madeline very seldom blushed; but now, conscious of her sudden color, a

genuine blush flamed on her face. It was irritating, because it was incomprehensible.

She received the papers from Stewart and thanked him. He bowed, then led the black down the path toward the corrals.

"When Stewart looks like that, he's been riding," said Florence. "But when his horse looks like that, he's sure been burning the wind."

Madeline watched the weary horse and rider limp down the path. What had made her thoughtful? Generally it was something new or sudden or inexplicable that stirred her mind to quick analysis. In this instance the thing that had struck her was Stewart's glance. He had looked at her, and the old burning, inscrutable fire, the darkness, had left his eyes. Suddenly they had been beautiful.

The look had not been one of surprise or admiration; nor had it been one of love. She was familiar, too familiar, with all three. It had not been a gaze of passion, for there was nothing beautiful in that. Madeline pondered; and presently she realized that Stewart's eyes had expressed a strange joy or pride. That expression Madeline had never before encountered in the look of any man. The longer she lived among these outdoor men the more they surprised her. Particularly, how incomprehensible was this cowboy Stewart! Why should he have pride or joy at sight of her?

Florence's exclamation recalled Madeline's attention to the approaching automobile. It was on the slope now, some miles down the long, gradual slant. Two yellow, funnel-shaped clouds of dust seemed to shoot out from behind the car

and roll aloft to join the column that stretched down the valley.

"I wonder what riding a mile a minute would be like," said Florence. "I'll sure make Link take me. Oh, but look at him come!"

The giant car resembled a white demon, and but for the dust would have appeared to be sailing in the air. Its motion was steadily forward, holding to the road as if on rails; and its velocity was astounding. Long gray veils, like pennants, streamed in the wind. A low rushing sound became perceptible; it grew louder, became a roar.

The car shot like an arrow past the alfalfa field, by the bunk-houses, where the cowboys waved and cheered. The horses and burros in the corrals began to snort and tramp and race in fright. At the base of the long slope of the foot-hill Link reduced his speed more than half; the car roared up to the ranch and crashed and cracked to a halt in the yard before the porch.

Madeline descried a gray, disheveled mass of humanity packed inside the car. Besides the driver there were seven occupants, and for a moment they appeared to be coming to life, moving and exclaiming under their veils and wraps and dust-shields.

Link Stevens stepped out, and, removing helmet and goggles, coolly looked at his watch.

"An hour an' a quarter, Miss Hammond," he said. "It's sixty-three miles by the valley road, an' you know there's a couple of bad hills. I reckon we made fair time, considerin' you wanted me to drive slow an' safe!"

(To be continued)

TO A FRIEND

LIFE ruined, and every one knows it?
You are shamed, and every wind blows it,
And the earth is an ear which has heard?
How foolish, how vain your despair!
Oh, comrade, the world does not care!
No time has the great world to heed you,
But any just claim 'twill concede you;
For your worth it will take your own word!

Forget it! The world has already
Forgotten your failure. Keep steady,
With eyes that look men in the face!
My friend, the thing never occurred,
If your actions ignore it; absurd,
Egotistic your trouble! Be strong,
For the right's sake atone for the wrong,
But yield nothing to fear—that is base!

Stokely S. Fisher

ICH DIEN

BY JANE ANDERSON

ILLUSTRATED BY M. LEONE BRACKER

JONES waited respectfully in the hallway, his head up, his shoulders well back, as becomes the valet to a colonel.

Beside him, on the cumbersome mahogany hat-rack, the topcoats and high hats of the visitors were within convenient reach. Jones had brushed and smoothed them carefully.

Behind the sliding doors of the dining-room he could hear the murmur of voices, sometimes broken into by laughter—the high, uncertain laughter of old men.

Jones unconsciously swayed nearer the closed doors, his head slightly to one side. The guests were officers from the colonel's old regiment, and they were reviewing their youth. It was not the first time they had dined with the colonel, and since Jones was not only valet, but butler, he knew what they always talked about. The days set apart for their coming were the high lights in his existence, and he lingered over the service that he might hear the things they told—stories of valor and of mighty deeds. No one of them was too modest to make mention of personal prowess.

Jones himself was an old man. The top of his head was quite bald, and the blue veins showed through the thin, wrinkled skin of his scalp. The fringe of hair above his collar was white, the dead, silvery white of the aged. His faded blue eyes were covered by a faint film, and when he laughed, which was seldom, they filled with easy tears.

The colonel rebelled at being old, at being shelved by the boyish, straight-backed West Pointers in their snug gray uniforms; but Jones had no regrets. This was because he had never been young. Of course, there had been a time when his years numbered less; but even so, he had never had youth in his heart.

When the colonel and his friends sat around the great mahogany table, they talked in low voices, sometimes brokenly, huskily—talked of men in battle, dirty, ragged, bleeding; men who fought where there were the dead and the dying, men who were not afraid of life, men who had no fear of death. And Jones, listening, his tasks undone, was not an old man with dim eyes and shrunken wrists; he was a boy, thrilled, trembling, stirred to the very depths of his soul.

It was not patriotism that moved him. He was but one of the great common people, and alas, America does not always teach her common folk to love and serve their country; too often, lust of money is what she makes them learn. That she has clear-eyed young men, thousands strong, to fill out the ranks of her army; that she has proud gray battle-ships to decorate her waterways, is but proof that service and love and honor may not be stamped out by greed.

For all that Jones knew, the war-vessels of his fatherland were flaming vermilion instead of that well-devised ocean-gray. He had never given thought to them. His own small fight for existence had occupied him too much to leave him time to consider anything beyond.

He had made a good fight—not a gallant one, such as a soldier would have made, but he had managed to keep alive; which in itself was a marvelous thing, for Jones was not of the strong and brave. He was weak and afraid, born not to fight, but to serve. This was why he was happy when he was set to polish the colonel's boots, or draw his cold bath in the morning.

Jones had a soul created for service; he asked nothing else but to be allowed to fill his appointed place.

The minor deities who watch over the lesser souls of the earth had not always been kind to him. Once they forsook him, turned away from him to more important matters, and left him, unaided, to his own futile devising. That was when his wife died—died at the very threshold of her womanhood, because there was neither food nor medicine, nor the money with which to buy them.

She would have taken with her the small son that she had brought into the world, for she was sick of the fight; but the baby grew and thrived, as slum babies do survive in the face of all the odds against them. And Jones loved him, watched over him day and night, for he had the blue eyes of his young mother who had given her life for him. He was very like her. His dark hair grew deep on his forehead in the selfsame widow's peak; and he had her mouth—smaller, but of the same sweet contour and softness.

But in sparing him, the lesser deities were but momentarily kind. The time came when Jones, starving, helpless, driven to the wall, carried the small, warm bundle to a certain brick house where the slum babies who will not die are taken in and cared for for a time. That was a bitter day for Jones, a young, stoop-shouldered man servant out of a job. In return for their kindness of heart he gave up all rights to his son; because the time would come when the little boy, if he lived, would be transferred to the care of some one else—given over, small body and soul, to some one who would sign papers and promise to bring him up as a gentleman.

This was the one grain of comfort that made his father keep up the fight for life—his son would be a gentleman. It was what his dead wife had talked about.

It is true that, when once more there was the wherewithal to buy food, Jones tried to reclaim his son; but at the brick house they would not so much as tell him to whom the boy had been given. The brick house was a charity home; and all the world knows that most charity officials are hardened to suffering.

These were some of the reasons why Jones was not a brave man, and why he walked soft-footed in the presence of the colonel and his officers. He did not know how to fight; the little spark of courage that had been given to him had long since been crushed out. He was a physical coward,

just as much as he was a moral coward; for one does not exist without the other. All of which had come about through no fault of his own.

Of course, the colonel did not know anything of this. He was not the only master who lives under the same roof with a servant for twenty odd years without once realizing that a heart and a soul can live behind deft fingers and willing feet. And Jones did not expect him to know. Being a good servant, he knew when he was in the presence of his superiors, and never presumed to ask consideration of them.

Day after day, and night after night, he did the things that he was bidden to do, unquestioning, grateful for the privilege of doing them.

That was why he stood for hours by the laden hat-rack, waiting, scarcely moving.

II

At length, when the colonel's guests came out of the dining-room, a little flushed with wine, hesitating before braving the cold and sleet of the night outside, Jones was ready with their coats and warmed mufflers.

"Better come on down to the club, colonel," one of them suggested.

The colonel hesitated, his hand over his whiskers, as was usual in moments of indecision.

"He's a Jap—going back in the morning. Now, those Japanese tactics—"

The colonel signaled for Jones to hold his coat.

Jones opened the door for them, and stood for a moment watching the four go down the sidewalk, still talking, gesticulating, but bent before the strong wind. A light, uncertain snow sifted down on the street, making diamonds on the frozen pools by the steps.

Jones stepped back gratefully into the warmth of the hallway. The house was so still that his footsteps sounded quite plainly on the thick rugs. He was sorry that the colonel had gone down to the club at such a late hour, for it was Thursday night, and he was alone. The cook and her up-stairs girl—demoralized, no doubt, by the New York servant's demand for one evening of partial rest out of the seven—insisted upon a night off every week. It was not that Jones liked them, for he did not; he was afraid to be alone in the great, empty house.

As he went down to the dining-room he gave a cautious look at the stairway, with its shining hand-rail disappearing into a well of darkness at the second floor. Above was yet another story, unlighted—a fearsome place to fumble around in after midnight. And below was the basement, filled with noises after the coming of dark.

If Jones had been without imagination, he could not have conjured up dire explanations of these sounds, and therefore would have had no fear; or, if he had possessed more imagination, he would have laughed at his own devising. As it was, he went timidly into the dining-room and slid the doors softly together behind him.

The light from the central chandelier made a golden pool on the bared surface of the table, and the silver-laden buffet was streaked with amber. A veil of cigar-smoke drifted close to the ceiling. Its fragrance hung in the portières, blended with the sweet smell of old wine.

Jones cleared the table of glasses and bottles, unconsciously tiptoeing as he went to and fro. He was wondering who it was that the colonel had gone to see at the club. He had the servant's faculty of piecing together a story from a scrap of conversation. He knew that his master would be late, for the colonel's eyes had brightened at the mention of the Japanese who knew something about the ways of war.

Jones thought again of the wonder of being unafraid. He had a vague wish that he could do something to bring that look into the colonel's eyes.

He stacked the glasses in the butler's pantry, with the emptied bottles; then he turned the lights low and went back to the buffet. One of the silver candlesticks was moved from its place, and he knew that the colonel had taken it up to point out some special charm that it possessed. He was always showing those candlesticks, and talking about them, quite regardless of whether his listeners were interested or not.

Jones put the misplaced one carefully into position, lifting it as if it were a fragile bit of glass. He did not in the least understand its worth, but whatever the colonel loved he also loved.

He looked around to see if there was anything that he had left undone. There was a fleck of gray ash on the rug by one of the chairs. He stooped over slowly, with the cautiousness of age, swept it up in his hand, and carried it to the fireplace.

He turned out the light and felt his way to the door, his fingers outspread so that he would not brush against anything. In the hall he hesitated, half hoping to hear the colonel's step outside. There was no sound but the singing of the wind in the quiet street.

He went up the stairs, holding to the rail to guide himself when he came to the dark second landing. He fumbled around until he found the colonel's door-knob, because it was extravagant to turn on lights unless it was absolutely necessary. Somebody had to economize for the colonel, since he himself would not.

He left the door of the colonel's room ajar. He wanted to close it, but he must lose no time in answering the bell should it ring. There was little for him to do, for it was a soldier's room, always in order. He inspected everything carefully, and, finding no other task, brought out some boots from the closet to polish them.

He should have carried them to the third floor, but he made excuses to himself and spread out some newspapers over the rug, kneeling down beside them. He took off his coat to save it from the strain—the old, long-tailed blue coat that was his badge of service.

He blacked the boots painstakingly and conscientiously, happy in the task, concentrated on it. They made quite a satisfactory row when he sat back waiting for the blacking to dry thoroughly before he finished them up.

Several minutes passed, and his mind went wandering to other things—to the stories of men who were fearless. He went over them bit by bit, thoughtfully, smiling a little, trying to remember the very words that had been said.

He came back to himself with a start, and set to work with the paste polish, putting it on with the tips of his fingers—for a lifetime of service brings mastery of an art, and he knew that the leather takes it better if it is rubbed in.

When they were done—a long, shining row to his credit—he got up, his knees stiff and unsteady under him. Leaving out a pair for the morning, he put the colonel's boots away in the wardrobe.

He leaned over and gathered up the newspapers. It was when he was folding one of them that he heard a faint sound. It came from down-stairs; it might have been the stirring of the portières in a draft.

Jones waited, bent forward. The newspaper shook in his hands, and the rustling made him start back.

The noise came up to him again. It seemed to be at one of the side windows below—a faint, sliding sound. Perhaps it was but the movement of the wind.

Then he heard, quite plainly, soft footsteps on the rugs. They were slow and even, unhurried, as if timed. The doors of the dining-room were sliding back softly—there was no mistaking the sound. There was even the little break where they always caught before they fitted into place.

His mind made frantic efforts to try and remember, but he could not think. Waves of heat and cold ran over him; his hands were wet with sweat. He turned cautiously



THE GUESTS WERE OFFICERS FROM THE COLONEL'S OLD REGIMENT, AND THEY WERE REVIEWING THEIR YOUTH

Then the house was still—so still that he could hear the beating of his own heart.

III

A HUNDRED times Jones had planned what he would do if ever he were by himself, and—

to look toward his coat, not knowing what he was doing. He made an aimless move to pick it up, but his hand dropped to his side and the paper slipped noiselessly to the floor.

He heard them again—soft, regular footsteps. A wild impulse to run came over him; but he could not think where to go. He crept toward the door to lock it. He closed it, and stood with his back against it, for he was trembling. Then, suddenly, he remembered the silver candlesticks, and he could see the colonel's smile as he lifted one of them.

He looked around the room, fighting for his breath. A gun stood in the corner—an army rifle. The light made a line of silver on the barrel. Jones had polished that barrel a thousand times. His mind ran off on vague speculations concerning his daily tasks—the dusting of the colonel's silver, and the rest. He thought again of the candlesticks—the colonel had said that they were priceless things, not to be bought or sold for money.

He stole across the room and took the rifle in both his hands. It seemed very heavy, and his sweaty fingers stuck to the wooden stock. He went back, driven along against his will. Out in the hall he reached around to close the door, and the latch made a terrifying sound as it clicked into the socket. He waited, but there was no sound except the murmur of the wind.

He went down the first few steps, trying to pray, but his mind would not remember the words. The treads seemed farther apart than before, and he had to feel for them with his feet. When he came into the light, something seemed to close down inside his throat, choking him. He drew back and half turned around; but the colonel had told him that those two pieces of silver had been carved by—Jones could not remember the name of that great man who had done his work so well.

He went ahead, a little more quickly, clinging with his free hand to the balustrade. He had to move his fingers stealthily, for his hands were wet and would not slide along the rail.

He got to the lower hall, and slunk along, hugging the wall. He stopped in the shadow of the portières. Within the dining-room, in the darkness, there was the sound of heavy breathing. Jones waited, trying to think. He had never heard anything so fearful as that regular inhaling and exhaling of breath.

Jones knew that it—whatever it was—must be near the door. He thought, for a second, that he might slip in between the portière and the door-post, so that he could not be seen against the light; but he knew that he could not manage that—that he must walk in across the threshold.

Perhaps the man's back would be to him; if it were not—

He stepped to the threshold, and his movement drowned out the breathing.

"Don't move!" he whispered.

The words were dragged out of him.

He held the gun in his right hand, leveled, his finger on the trigger.

There was no sound. The room was pitch-black. He knew that he must get to the chandelier. He moved a little farther forward, trembling, forgetting that the gun was silhouetted against the bright hallway.

He reached the table, and there was a stir near a chair on the other side of it. With his free hand he turned on the light. For a second he was dazzled and could see nothing for the yellow spots that danced before his eyes.

A man stood by the buffet, and at his feet were the silver candlesticks, thrown in with other pieces. The first thought that came to Jones was surprise that it should be a man—a normal man, alive, with arms and legs like other men. He had expected some terrifying thing—what he did not know. This was but a human being, his coat thrown across the back of a chair, the cuffless sleeves of his shirt turned back. Being a valet, Jones saw that there was no crease in his trousers, and one of the belt-straps was torn loose at the waist-line.

He watched Jones steadily, the muscles in his cheek twitching under the skin. Then, suddenly, he swung forward, his hands flung out.

The gun moved in Jones's hand—a movement of terror, not protection. The man fell back. He was muttering under his breath.

Jones listened to him like one in a dream, powerless to speak. He began to believe that it was not true. He was not down-stairs, but up in the colonel's bedroom again, blacking the long line of boots. He knew that he must think something out quickly; but his thoughts shied away from it.

The intruder stared at him, silent. His eyes shifted to the door, to the windows, then back to Jones.

"Well, it looks like you got me!" the man said. His words echoed in the room. The sound died out softly. "What you goin' to do?" he said. The sweat had come out in little beads on his forehead. "How about—how about cash?"

Jones did not understand. He was trying to think how he could get to the telephone. His brain, always slow, could invent no scheme.

The man seemed to read his very thoughts.

"It don't mean nothing to you—no—

body'll know. You just keep your mouth shut, and I'll—" His voice changed; it was slower, less desperate. "I been up once, and there ain't no tellin' how it would come out for me this time. I'm not takin' chances. I can give you fifty—that's straight enough. It don't matter to you and it does to me."

The intruder was talking fast, half whispering. His eyes did not move from the gun-barrel.

"A hundred?" he said, breathing hard.

Jones could not answer. His knees seemed to be giving away under him and he was afraid he would fall.

"Hundred and fifty? I can get out just like I come. It don't matter to you."

But Jones did not hear him. His mind was making countless efforts to remember where the telephone was.

"Two hundred—you got to take it—it's all I got. Two hundred or I'll—"

"No!" Jones said. "No, because I'll shoot—now!"

He did not know what a pathetic admission of past weakness he was making.

"I tell you I been up once. I hadn't done nothin' that time—that's square." The man's lips were white, and the sweat was running down his cheeks. "For Heaven's sake!" he said.

The words were softly spoken, but it seemed as if they were shouted. He put his hands on the table, leaning on them.

Jones wavered. He could not remember what was right and what was wrong. Was it his business to give a burglar over into the hands of the law? He looked at him, wondering if it were better for him to serve time again, or better that he should go free. Some part of his life still lay before him.

Then the subconscious traditions of law and order, of his duty, came up to the surface of the butler's mind. Jones had done his duty all the days of his life.

"Put on your coat," Jones said. The man obeyed him silently. "Go out in the hall—ahead of me."

He did not move. He was staring at Jones, calculatingly, his eyelids lowered; but Jones was no longer afraid. His eyes did not waver. It was the other man's eyes that fell.



JONES WENT DOWN THE FIRST FEW STEPS, TRYING TO PRAY

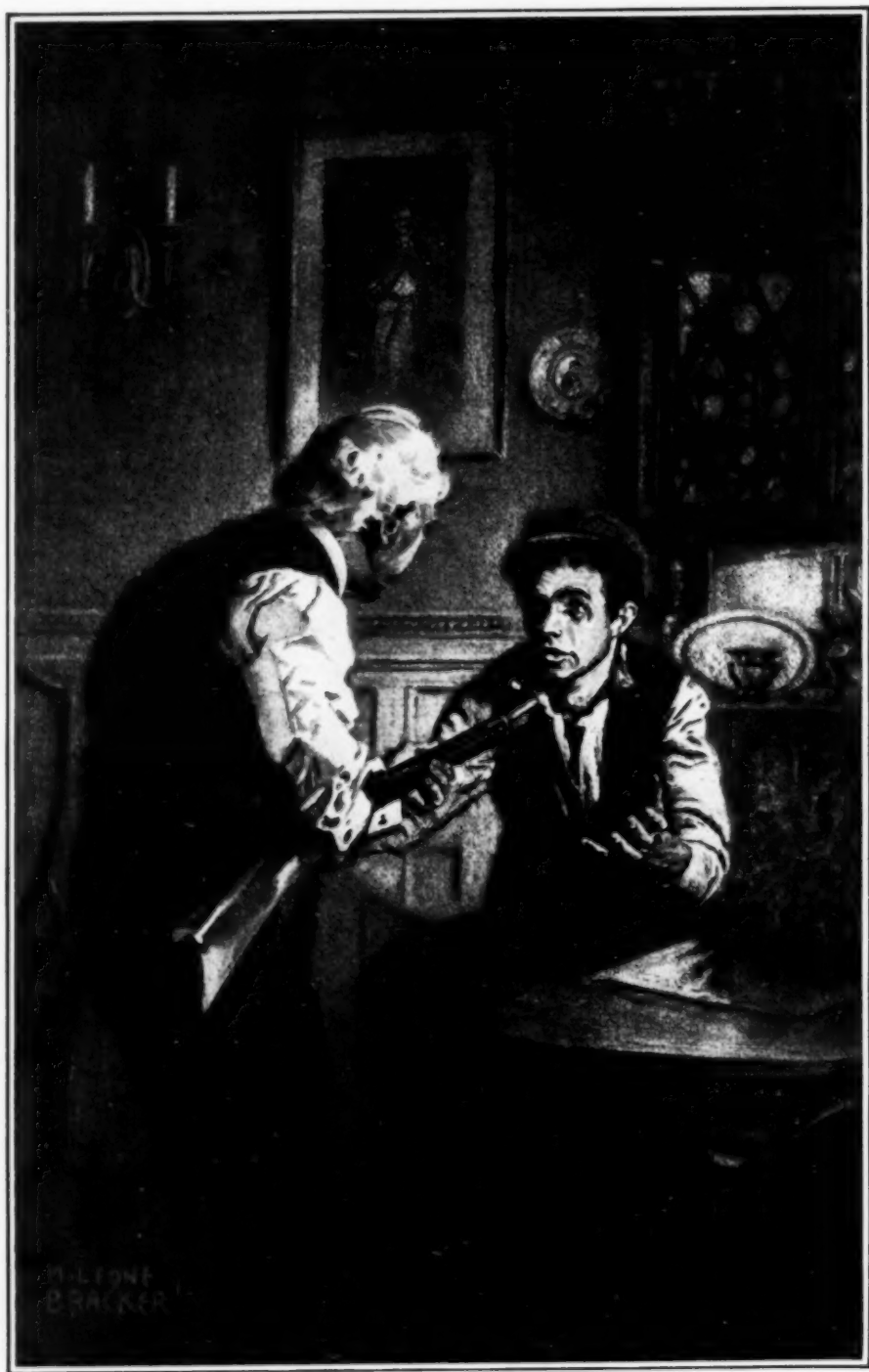
He turned toward the door, and Jones, walking behind him, saw that his shoulders sagged. Jones faltered—stopped. From where he stood he could see the nickel trimmings of the telephone twinkling under the hall light.

He made the man sit in a chair, facing him, while he took down the receiver.

"Police—quick as you can!" he said into the mouthpiece, and stuttered out the street and number of the house.

The central girl screamed, which for a second both astonished and dismayed him. He forgot to hang up the receiver, and it dangled on its short cord.

He heard steps outside and some one fumbling at the door. It flashed through his mind that the law worked swiftly. He half turned about, and the man sprang at him from behind.



THEN, SUDDENLY, HE SWUNG FORWARD, HIS HANDS FLUNG OUT

Jones crashed to the floor; the gun caught beneath him. He tried to fight back, but his strength was all gone.

IV

It was not the police. It was the colonel and two of his officers who had come back with him for the night. To handle the situation was but short work for the three of them. There was a little fight, but the colonel knew something of fighting, and loved it.

When the police came their man was ready for them, some blood on his face, his hands tied together behind him with the colonel's silk handkerchief. Jones was sitting alone, bent over, in a chair in the sun-lighted drawing-room.

He heard them talking in the other room, and sometimes laughing. The colonel found the whole affair very amusing, since his valet was not hurt, as he had feared at first. He said that he didn't want any notoriety, and Jones heard him arguing with the bluecoats of the law. Then the policemen went away, their heavy feet echoing on the steps.

Jones stood up, painfully. His head ached; there was a singing sound in the temples and at the back of his neck. The colonel saw him in the hall and came out of the dining-room to speak to him.

"Well!" he said. He was still smiling. Jones waited respectfully. "You were upstairs, I suppose, and heard the front window go up?"

"Yes, sir."

"Pretty tough-looking customer! Then you came down from the third floor?"

"Second floor, sir."

"Well!" the colonel said again. "It

makes me a bit nervous when I think what might have happened." He was serious for the first time. "Where were the maids?"

"Out, sir."

Jones glanced down and saw his blackened fingers, and was covered with confusion. He put his hands hastily behind him, instinctively afraid of a reprimand.

The colonel would have liked him to tell more, to go over the little affair in detail; but Jones did not know that there was anything more to tell. Besides, he had remembered that he was coatless, without his livery before the master of the house. He wanted to get away.

The colonel looked at him, his hand over his whiskers, and Jones's fingers worked nervously.

"Well, I wouldn't have lost those candlesticks for their weight in pure gold! You did a good job, Jones," the colonel said.

Then he turned and went into the dining-room.

But Jones was not thrilled, as he had thought he would be. He went slowly upstairs, stopping on the second floor for his coat. He got out of the room hastily, for it made him remember. He went up the third flight of stairs, waiting several times to get his breath.

In his own room, he sat down on the side of his narrow bed, his aching head bowed on his hands.

He had learned that there are many kinds of courage. He was not thinking of what the colonel had said. He was thinking about the burglar whose eyes were blue and whose dark hair grew too far down on his forehead in what is known as a widow's peak. He was thanking God that his own son had not recognized him!

WIND MAGIC

THE wind sweeps over the corn,
The wind sweeps over my heart;
It lifts me up and blows
My soul and body apart;

And I run, I run by its side
In bodiless liberty—
I ripple the leaves of the wood,
I dapple and darken the sea;

I rush through populous streets,
I eddy through glade and glen—
And now the wind dies down,
And I am my body again!

Harry Kemp

AMERICAN CHARACTER IN AMERICAN FICTION

BY BRANDER MATTHEWS

PROFESSOR OF DRAMATIC LITERATURE IN COLUMBIA
UNIVERSITY

Three Books Which Depict the
Actualities of Present-Day Life



AT the opposite poles of the art of fiction are the novels which are only stories and the novels which are only studies of character. Probably most of the permanent masterpieces of the art stand remote from either pole, although a little nearer to the latter. Certainly most of the "best-sellers" of any year stand closer to the former.

It is the story itself, with the swift sequence of its situation, with the flash and glitter of its surprising episodes, and with the rush and rattle of its adventures, which is most likely to win immediate popularity with the main mass of readers. Of course, this popularity has little hope of long life; and when once the situations have unrolled themselves, there is slight temptation to return to them in the vain hope of reviving the glitter or of recalling an echo of the rattle.

Few things fade away as irrevocably as the story which everybody is reading—to borrow the apt phrase of the advertisements. Where are the novels of yesteryear? Or, as *Hans Breitmann* asked:

"Where is the lovely golden cloud that floated on the mountain's brow?"

Who of us now can remember even the name of the writer of "The Lamplighter," a best-seller of sixty years ago, or of "Rutledge," a best-seller of fifty years ago, or of "Called Back," and "The House on the

Marsh," and "Mr. Barnes of New York," best-sellers of more recent decades? And why should any of us wish to recall these vanished tales which left no palpable deposit on our memories? They are dead stories of dead seasons; they served their purpose in their day, in that they enabled us to pass away our time. They were stories which were only stories, tales more or less stuffed with adventure, and more or less empty of character. They did not really aspire to survive; they were contentedly ephemeral. Sufficient unto the day is the novel thereof.

These examples of story-telling for the sake of the story have faded away because they lacked the sole mordant which would have fixed them in our minds; they lacked one or more recognizable and unforgettable characters. They have gone, one and all, out into the night of black oblivion, simply because they were not peopled by fellow human beings whom we could take to heart.

In the same years when the ghosts of these dead and departed tales were still stalking the earth, other works of fiction achieved a popularity not so immediate, perhaps, and not so wide-spread at first, but far more durable. Mr. Howells's "Rise of Silas Lapham," Mr. James's "Daisy Miller," and Mark Twain's "Huckleberry Finn" had a vogue less spectacular because less overwhelming than

that of "Mr. Barnes of New York"; and on the far side of the Atlantic, Robert Louis Stevenson's "Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde," Mr. Hardy's "Tess of the D'Urbervilles," and Mr. Kipling's "Kim" succeeded in pleasing almost as many readers as "Called Back" and "The House on the Marsh."

"Kim" and "Huck Finn" are good stories, considered simply as stories; they are very good stories, indeed—better to my thinking merely as tales of adventure than their evanescent rivals. But they survive because they are something more than merely stories, whereas their more immediately popular competitors are now unwept, unhonored, and unsung.

The appeal of the mere story is exhausted absolutely with the single reading; we submit ourselves once to the shock of its situations, and there's an end to its potency. It has no storage battery of interest to thrill us again and to signal an invitation to return. But the appeal of the story which is also a gallery of characters is inexhaustible. I, for one, cannot count the number of times that I have entered again into friendly and familiar relation with *Silas Lapham* and *Daisy Miller*, or with that pair of sturdy young wanderers, *Huckleberry Finn* and *Kimball O'Hara*.

No doubt the author felt flattered when a casual stranger expressed a willingness to give a goodly sum if he had never read the author's masterpiece, explaining promptly that he would thus be able to buy back the pleasure of reading it for the first time. But this unexpected compliment is not quite so complimentary as it may appear at first sight, since it implies that the book needed the flavor of freshness, and that it could not well withstand the test of a second reading. And this implication is unfounded, because a narrative of adventure as rich in character as "Huck Finn" or "Kim" yields up its full savor only after repeated perusals. There is more in the books that are wealthy with humanity than can be discovered at the first reading, even if that first reading may amply disclose the story itself simply as a story.

The kind of novel which can be described as "a rattling good yarn" is inferior to the narrative in which human conduct is soberly considered; but it is not easy to spin and it is not without merits of its own. It is often despised by superior persons. Literary mandarins, dwellers in ivory

towers, secure in their sole possession of the only key to all the arts, cannot help despising that which the plain people are competent to enjoy. It is natural that the aristocrats of culture should recoil from that which has the power of pleasing the ordinary reader. They prefer pound-cake to good bread, white or brown. But man cannot live by cake alone; and the more delicate our taste, the quicker we are to appreciate good bread. The broader and the deeper our culture is, the more likely we are to relish a good story for its own sake, even if the persons who carry on the tale are only the traditional figures of fiction.

Perhaps no man of our time had a wider outlook on books and on men than the late Andrew Lang. He was frank in the expression of his gratitude for any tale that would so entrance him for the moment that he forgot the world with all its insistent problems and its incessant conflicts. What he desired in a story was to find forgetfulness of trouble:

Pour out the nepenthe, in short, and I shall not ask if the cup be gold-chased by Mr. Stevenson, or a buffalo-horn beaker brought by Mr. Haggard from Kakuanaland—the *Baron of Bradwardine's* bear or the "Cup of Hercules" of Théophile Gautier, or merely a common wine-glass of M. Fortuné du Boisgobey's or M. Xavier de Montépin's. If only the nepenthe be foaming there—the delightful draft of dear forgetfulness—the outside of the cup may take care of itself.

This is put with characteristic cleverness, but it evokes two remarks. The first is that Lang himself did not confine his reading to the exciting narratives of Xavier de Montépin and of Fortuné du Boisgobey; he continued to the end of his life to nourish his mind on the more solid food of Homer and Theocritus, Shakespeare and Molière. And the second remark is that in the long run it is as dangerous to go to a bookstore for the anodyne of dreams as it is to go to a drug-store for any other opiate. The novels that "take us out of ourselves," as the phrase is, are not wholesome as a steady diet; they do not invigorate our souls as do the novels that take us into ourselves, that make us think about ourselves and about our fellow men and our fellow women.

More than a score of years ago Mr. Howells expressed his frank opinion of the novels that "make one forget life and all its cares and duties; they are not in the

least like the novels which make you think of these, and shame you into at least wishing to be a helpfuller and more wholesome creature than you are."

THE PROGRESS OF THE ART OF FICTION

It was about as long ago that Mr. Howells startled and shocked the unthinking by the assertion that the art of fiction is a finer art now than it was in Thackeray's day. Of course, no one really familiar with the history of any art should have been shocked by this remark. The art of fiction is a finer art to-day than it was in Thackeray's time, just as it was finer in Thackeray's time than it had been in Fielding's time, and just as it was finer in Fielding's day than it had been in Cervantes's day. This is not to say that Fielding is a greater novelist than Cervantes, or that Thackeray is greater than Fielding, or that any novelist of this new century is greater than Thackeray. It is only to say that the art itself is finer, more delicate, more careful in its craftsmanship, in its planning, and in its joinery. "Don Quixote," for example, is perhaps the noblest novel ever written, but its construction is unspeakably careless.

I may be permitted to recall here a saying of the renowned Italian goldsmith and antiquary, Castellani, made to my father more than forty-five years ago. My father had asked as to the skill of Castellani's workmen; and the Italian expert promptly responded that there was a constant advance in certainty of execution, in finish of workmanship, in conscientious manual dexterity.

"My men can copy anything of Benvenuto Cellini's or of any of the other master workers in metal and in enamel; and their work will be more perfect than the original. But there's scarcely one of them capable of any original designing!"

What is true of the art of the goldsmith is true also of the art of the novelist. Whether or not the novelists of the present are as capable of originality as those of the past, they are at least better craftsmen, because the state of the art, to use the apt phrase of the engineers, has advanced; because fiction is to-day a finer art than it was a century ago, even if we happen now not to have as many giants as may have existed once upon a time.

Even in the dark ages of a score of years ago, when Mr. Howells was engaged in

stirring up the critics in their cages, the true meaning of this chance remark ought not to have been misunderstood. It was misunderstood, however, and it brought a storm of abuse upon Mr. Howells's head.

Some of those who did not relish his criticisms had their easy revenge in abusing his novels. It was very helpful for the more general appreciation of the little-understood art of the novelist that Mr. Howells should discuss this art and declare its principles and apply them. But his iconoclastic essays in criticism were not helpful to his own fame as a novelist. Most readers rather dislike technical analysis of the arts; they prefer to be ravished by the result of the artist's work, and they detest being taken into the workshop and made to consider the processes. As Joseph Joubert asserted long ago:

We do not like, in the arts, to see whence our impressions arise; the Naiad should hide her urn; the Nile should conceal her sources.

The echo of Mr. Howells's critical battles of long ago is now faint; and many of his younger critics seem not to know that he also was a critic once upon a time. And I—who have delighted in Mr. Howells's novels ever since I read the earliest of them, "Their Wedding Journey," now twoscore years ago—have been greatly gratified to see the cordiality of appreciation with which his latest contribution to fiction has been received.

A PICTURE OF AMERICAN LIFE

His latest book is called "New Leaf Mills, a Chronicle"; and to convey to the reader of this paper any adequate impression of the mellow charm, the simple grace, the absolute sincerity of this quiet and restful portrayal of a group of very American characters in very American conditions, would demand a style as firm and as caressing as its author's own.

Mr. Howells here presents to us one episode from the existence of a dreamer who lacks the sense of reality although he has a sense of humor; who is impractical although he has a Yankee ingenuity in his fingers; who refuses to believe in danger, and who thereby disarms the man who thinks himself his enemy; who believes against every doubt, and who fails again as he has failed before and as he will fail more than once after he has passed out of the pages of this volume. In spite of the

Indian summer haze in which the book is bathed, the veracity of it is unflinching. The author is inexorable in setting before us things as they are and as they had to be because they were rooted in character and flowered out of circumstance. He does not seek to startle us with the emotions of surprise, and he is constantly rewarding us with emotions of recognition.

As we read, we feel that *Owen Powell* actually set out to establish the New Leaf Mills in a little village in the middle West sixty years ago; and that he took with him the wife who is painted for us in these pages with the utmost economy of stroke and with the utmost accuracy of color. We get to know his children and his relatives and the new neighbors at the lonely village where he makes his hopeless venture; and, best of all, we get to know him, *Owen Powell*, better and better; and we get to feel that he is well worth knowing, this dreamer, this optimistic idealist, this right American, incapable as he is of getting on in the world as other right Americans expect to do.

The likings of primitive man and of children—who are more or less in the same stage of progress as primitive man—are for tales of the impossible, filled with fairies and giants and dragons. The likings of men a little less primitive and of children of a larger growth are for tales of the improbable, with *Quentin Durward* and *D'Artagnan* passing unscathed through a heterogeneity of deadly perils. Most of us who read novels nowadays have so far left childhood behind us that we prefer to have our story-tellers confine themselves to the treatment of the probable, as Thackeray does, for the most part, and as Trollope does nearly always.

Only a few novel-readers there are—although the number of them is steadily increasing—who make an insistent demand upon the story-teller to transcend the merely probable and to give us only the inevitable. This Hawthorne did in "The Scarlet Letter"; George Eliot in "Romola"—at least so far as *Tito Melema* is concerned; Turgenev in "Smoke"; Tolstoy in "Anna Karénina"; and Mr. Howells himself in "The Rise of Silas Lapham" and in "A Modern Instance."

This latest tale, "New Leaf Mills," is not plucked out of the palpitating heart of actuality; it is not up to date in its problems; it is not an elucidation of any scare-

head story in the morning newspaper. But none the less does it rise to the same artistic plane; none the less does it strike the austere note of inevitability. If *Owen Powell* was the man that the author has projected before us, then the things which happen to him and to his in this story are the things which would have happened in real life, inevitably and inexorably.

ROBERT HERRICK'S NEW BOOK

In "One Woman's Life" Mr. Robert Herrick has also given us a study of the middle West, since Chicago is the scene of its more important episodes. Mr. Herrick does not impart quite the same sense of inevitability to his novel that we discover in Mr. Howells's tale; but all that he relates we instantly accept as certainly probable. And Mr. Herrick's novel is plucked out of the palpitating heart of actuality. Although its story begins a score of years ago, the career of its heroine is continued well into this new century. Again, while Mr. Howells's tale is leisurely in its telling, Mr. Herrick's is swift and almost tumultuous in its rapid unrolling. It rushes forward as if its author had accepted Thoreau's assertion that "there is more force in speed than in weight."

The title of Mr. Herrick's book is aptly chosen. What he has here to set before us is the life of one woman, *Milly Ridge*, from the day when she arrives in Chicago, an undeveloped girl of sixteen, to the day, nearly a score of years later, when she leaves Chicago, the bride of her second husband. It is to her character and to her career that the author invites our attention. *Milly Ridge* is the central planet; all the other figures, men and women alike, are only satellites, shining with light reflected from her. And *Milly* rewards the reader for the attention thus focused on her. She is put before us with unhesitating insight; she is not extenuated or apologized for; she stands on her own feet, and she speaks out of her own mouth. She is alive in every limb; and she is a type possible only here in these States—although doubtless it would not be difficult to find parallels in certain European countries.

Milly Ridge is a pretty woman, not a professional beauty, but undeniably a pretty woman; and, in fact, she is almost to be described as only a pretty woman. But she has the social gift, and this is her chief asset in her career. She is indisputably

and indomitably social; she not only likes people and people of all sorts and conditions, but people like her at first sight, and they continue to like her to the end, even when they no longer have any very good reason to like her. She has charm, of course, but apparently her chief quality is not so much charm as a reciprocity of liking which leads casual acquaintances to lend her a helping hand and lures friends to make serious sacrifices for her.

It is a mark of deep understanding that Mr. Herrick does not endow her with an ardent temperament and does not lead her through any amorous misadventures. She is, as she understands herself, a "good woman"; in fact, she takes pride in what the elder Henry James would have termed her "flagrant morality." She is engaged without love, and she breaks the engagement. She is almost engaged with only a little love, and she throws this admirer over because she really has fallen in love at last. And when her husband dies, worn out by the struggle to supply her social exigencies, she marries after a decent interval the admirer she had thrown over.

She moves through life along the line of least resistance, taking whatever she can reach out for that chance may offer, feeling vaguely that she is a superior being, that society owes her not only a living, but a living adorned with purple and fine linen, and that society is under this obligation simply because she is a woman, a pretty woman and a "good woman." Probably this type of social parasite is not uncommon in America to-day; and Mr. Herrick is to be congratulated upon the skill with which he has depicted it, accurately, amply, and disinterestedly, without bias for or against, and permitting every reader to draw his or her own moral in his or her own fashion.

These two studies of American character are avowedly fiction, although they are also unmitigably veracious. They both fulfil the definition of the novel which the British historian, J. R. Green, once gave to Mr. Henry James:

"History without documents — nothing to prove it."

A CURIOUS PHASE OF LIFE

Mr. Howells's book and Mr. Herrick's, each in its own way, is a contribution to the history of American life and manners. With them I wish to class another book not so recently issued and not so widely read, a

book which purports to be an actual record of fact, but which seems to me to fall rather within Green's definition of fiction. This is an anonymous volume entitled "The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man."

The title is a little startling, but the book itself is not in the least sensational. It tells in detail the life of a young fellow of mixed blood, who is, in fact, almost white, and who in the end abandons his darker brethren and passes thereafter as a white man. He records his own feeling that he is a deserter to the cause of the negro, and he sets forth his high esteem for the men who are now maintaining that cause.

"Beside them I feel small and selfish—" he declares. "I am an ordinarily successful white man who has made a little money; they are men who are making history and a race."

That the story of this ex-colored man's career, from his childhood to his maturity, with its many episodes in many cities, was written by a colored man is indisputable; and it is therefore also a contribution to the history of American life and manners. It takes us into many circles, the existence of which is unknown to white readers; it gives, for example, a fleeting vision of the colored "Tenderloin" of New York. It may not be a record of actual fact, but it contains what is higher than actual fact, the essential truth. It has indisputable veracity, even if it is imagined rather than recollected.

It has significance for all of us who want to understand our fellow citizens of darker hue. It is written calmly, clearly, simply; in fact, it is composed in full accord with the principle enunciated by Taine in one of his letters—the principle "that a writer should be a psychologist, not a painter or a musician; that he should be a transmitter of ideas and of feelings, not of sensations."

Here, then, are three serious studies of American character in the form of fiction; and in no one of these three books is there any plot, so called, or any exciting situation, or anything that could be put on the stage or that suggests the stage. If Robert Louis Stevenson was right in declaring that the serious drama must deal with the great passionate crises of existence, "when duty and inclination come nobly to the grapple," then no one of these stories is really dramatic. Yet by one reader at least they have been found intensely interesting, because they are rich in human nature.

THE MATED RUBIES

BY MULLOY FINNEGAN

AUTHOR OF "SAGE-BRUSH SALLY'S MOTHER," "OUT OF THE STORM," ETC.

WITH A DRAWING (SEE FRONTISPIECE) BY E. M. ASHE

"COME!" said the man who was cooking the bacon and eggs.

And the man who opened the cabin door and came in out of the blazing sun said:

"I'd like to trouble you for a drink of water. We're putting in these telephone-poles in the hills here, and my partner's gone off somewhere with the water-bottle."

"Help yourself," said the prospector, motioning with his fork to an ice-box in the further corner of the room. "Raise the lid. You'll find a bottle against the ice."

"Ice!" repeated the stranger. "I am in luck! Didn't know there was such a thing this side of the saloon. I certainly picked out the right cabin when I came hunting a drink of water."

"It's that ring," said the prospector, watching the hand that was pouring out the water. "It had to find its mate." He came over, and, setting down the platter of bacon and eggs, laid his own hand, back up, on the oilcloth-covered table. "There's its mate," he said.

"Strange!" said the other, putting his hand beside it.

On the little finger of each gleamed a single pigeon-blood ruby. The settings, too, were identical—of dead gold, rudely hammered out by hand.

"Mine has a flaw in it," said the telephone-pole man.

"So has mine," said the prospector; "the same flaw."

"I got mine in the Philippines," said the telephone-pole man; "from my bunkie. Won it in a poker-game."

"And I got mine where your bunkie got it," said the prospector; "from our mother."

"Then you're—"

"Joe Balton's brother Dave."

"Gray is my name," said the other; "Harry Gray."

Next moment the two hands with the two ruby rings were clasping each other in mutual greeting.

"Poor Joe!" said Gray, pouring out some more water. "He was killed not long afterward."

"Yes," said his brother, putting more dishes on the table, "and we had him brought home for burial. But I ften wondered what became of the ring. Sit down! If we're going to be friends, we might as well commence now."

In the course of the meal, Dave Balton told Harry Gray about the rings. Their mother, in whose family they had been for many generations, gave one to Dave and one to Joe, fondly hoping that they might help keep the boys together. There was an old tradition that wherever one ring was, the other was sure to show up sooner or later. Dave said, quite seriously, that the two rubies were always seeking each other, and never seemed to be satisfied unless they were together.

"We kept together pretty well," he went on, "even for brothers, until the Spanish-American War broke out. Then Joe volunteered, and was sent to the Philippines. We looked for him back, of course"—when Dave said "we," he seemed to include the framed photograph of a girl on the cabin wall—"but it seems that he parted with the ring. And here you are, in his stead! It does look like there was something in it." He looked again to the picture. "Joe was to have married her," he said. "She threw me over for him."

Whether the rings had anything to do with it or not, the wearers became great friends. When Harry Gray got through with the telephone job, Dave Balton had him come and live in the little cabin; and the two men went prospecting together. They were inseparable. Every now and then they struck something, but no matter which of them found it, it always belonged to the two.

Dave got letters from the East. Home strings, it seems, still coiled tightly around him, in spite of his having come West to forget it and his unfortunate love-affair.

Harry Gray got letters from nowhere. He seemed to have cut away from all ties. He had been all over the world, and had been rich and poor in turns. When nothing better offered, he was glad to get jobs like planting telephone-poles, or to work his way to some new country.

"I don't care for your brother's girl," he said one day, in his usual blunt manner, as he stopped in front of the picture, with his hands in his pockets.

"The sweetest girl in New York!" said Dave, joining him.

"Oh, one of your apartment-house girls! She'd never do for me. Give me the girl that will roam the world with me—that cares nothing for her life, and will face danger as I do—that will take a chance in a new country, where neither she nor any one else has ever set foot before. Your sweetest girl in New York wouldn't do that!"

"You don't know what she'd do," said Dave.

It wasn't long before the two friends struck something worth while. It put a few thousand dollars into the pockets of each of them.

"What are you going to do with yours?" asked Dave.

"Oh, take another jolt around the world," said Gray. "I'm getting restless. Want to come along?"

"No," said Dave. "I'm going back—to marry the sweetest girl in New York!"

And so they parted. There were tears in both men's eyes when they gripped hands at Reno, where they had come to get Dave's train.

"So-long, old man!" said Gray, as it was starting to pull out. "I hope you'll be happy. Call the first kid after me, and I'll remember it in my will. So-long!"

"I will," called back Dave, "if you'll

drop us a line now and then so we can let you know when it happens. So-long!"

II

DAVE's few thousands enabled him to open a brokerage-office, where he made a specialty of mining stocks. He married the sweetest girl in New York, lived in an apartment in the Fifties, and kept one maid. He was so happy that it was hard to believe any dead brother had ever figured in his love-affairs.

He heard from his friend occasionally. A post-card came from China, then one from Australia; then one saying that he was trying to start a revolution in Nicaragua, failing which he was going down to Panama to see that the canal was dug right. That was the last. And when the baby came, nobody knew where to find the would-be godfather to acquaint him with the event.

The baby was a girl, but they called it Harry, just the same. She was christened Harriet.

Little Harry was a year old, and could almost understand some of the things they tried to tell her about the godfather who was roaming the world, when her little life flickered and then went out entirely. She wasn't the only baby who died in New York that summer, but she left an awful hole in the Balton family.

A calm had settled on it after its first grief—that stupid calm which makes people go about as if in a dream. In this condition, Dave was turning out of Wall Street when he ran into somebody.

"Look out where you're going!" said the man.

The next moment two hands with ruby rings were clasping each other in affectionate greeting. There were tears in both men's eyes as the sorrowing one tried to tell the other of his bereavement.

Dave took Harry Gray home, and introduced him to Mrs. Balton, who made everything as pleasant as possible for her husband's friend. Some of the gloom lifted from the little household when the wanderer began telling of the varied fortunes and misfortunes which fate had dealt out to him in the two years since the men had been parted.

"How do you like him?" Dave asked his wife, at the first opportunity.

"Don't like him at all," she candidly admitted. "He is interesting, but he's not the kind of man I like."

Unconsciously she returned the compliment that Gray had paid her picture in the cabin in the desert.

He was with them about three days when a new trouble happened. Dave slipped on the sidewalk and broke his right arm. His wife was telephoned for, and got to the hospital almost as quickly as he did.

"What did they do with my ring?" he asked, when he came out of the anesthetic, and noticed the bare fingers that hung between the boards and bandages.

"I have it, dear," whispered his wife. "I'll give it to you when we get home."

At the dinner-table that evening he noticed it on her hand when she was pouring out the coffee; but he didn't like to say anything before their guest.

Afterward, he reached out his left hand and asked her to put the ring on it.

"Let me wear it for a few days," she pleaded childishly. "You used to, don't you remember?"

Then he remembered—but not till then—that he used to; and he felt less unkindly toward the dead brother.

"I'd rather you would not, dear," he said. "I don't want you to wear it."

She drew it off petulantly, and threw it to him.

"Oh, I forgot," she said, coming over and slipping it on a finger of his well hand.

There it remained while he and the man who wore its mate went about together; for Dave took Harry Gray everywhere, even to the office, where he proved a valuable substitute for the disabled arm, till he announced a sudden determination to go to Alaska.

"Why, you just can't go away from us now," pleaded Dave. "We haven't taken you anywhere yet. Besides"—he laughed, indicating the sling—"we cannot get along without you."

"Oh, those boards 'll be off in a few days," replied Gray, "and you'll be all right again. Besides, I *must* go," he persisted, "or I'll miss my boat. I've got to get to Frisco by the 15th."

And so he went.

They expected to hear from him when he got to San Francisco, but they didn't. Then they saw about the boat leaving there on the 15th, loaded with passengers for the new gold region in Alaska. And they saw, too, where it jammed into an iceberg and went to the bottom with all on board but five.

The names of the five were given. Harry Gray's was not one of them.

Dave Balton took his new grief hard. He would mope, sometimes for hours, thinking of the hand that would never clasp his again in affectionate greeting. No power on earth could bring the man back from the bottom of the ocean.

Then a new terror presented itself, and he was afraid to wear the ring. He took it off and laid it away in a drawer.

The next day he saw his wife wearing it. It was too large for her, but she had wrapped some silk thread around it and made it fit her middle finger.

"For Heaven's sake, Ella," he said, "take that thing off!"

"Well, you are not wearing it," she offered in excuse.

"No, and I don't want *you* to wear it, either." Then he softened. "Don't you understand?"

"I hope you are not placing any confidence in that old superstition," she jeered.

"I don't know whether I am or not," he replied; "but it's just as well not to take any chances. Our baby is gone, and now my friend is gone." He came over and put an arm around her. "Sweetheart, you're all I've got now! Come, give me the ring, and I'll throw it away somewhere."

She brightened.

"Oh, I know," she said. "Let's take it with us next time we go on the water, and drop it overboard. If it is destined to follow the other to the bottom of the ocean, why not hurry it there—alone?"

He was glad to accept her concession. He didn't interfere when he saw her make a parcel of it in tissue paper; then she found a little box for it, tied it securely with string, and handed it to him to put back in the drawer.

He felt easier after that. At night, when he came home, he would look to see that it was there. He had no reason to think that it was ever disturbed. He didn't say anything more about it, nor did she; and he began to believe that she had forgotten it.

She was full of such humors. She had changed much since their baby's death, and was still changing. Peevish and patient in turns, obstinate and submissive, talkative and silent; at one moment irritable, the next all loving-kindness.

He would watch these moods, and was alarmed for her health, for the nerve strain was telling in her appearance. She would

toss and moan in her sleep, and a stray moonbeam once pointed out her hand holding the little chain she wore around her neck. He knew there was a locket on it containing a curl from their dead baby's head; and, even as he looked, she mumbled: "Harry!"

Then one day she asked when they were going to take that boat-ride.

"With the ring, you know," she said. "Let's go on Sunday and have it over."

She had not forgotten.

They were not far from the Statue of Liberty when he took the little package from his pocket and started to untie it.

"What are you trying to do?" she asked him.

"I want to take a last look at it," he replied.

"Don't be foolish," she said.

She snatched the box from him and threw it far out in the water.

"Thank God!" he said, when he saw it sink.

III

SHE was tender after that, and he thought she felt the relief as well as he did. But she was still changing.

Silent moods would come upon her, when Dave couldn't get a word out of her. Then, when he did, "Oh!" she'd say, as if he had brought her back from somewhere.

She went down-town a great deal—to the matinées, or shopping. When he could, he would come up-town and have lunch with her, because he didn't like to have her going around so much alone. He would leave her at the door of the theater. Afterward, she would seem to have forgotten what she saw; or, at other times, she was so full of the play that she overdid it.

She would start out to buy something and come home without having made the purchase. Once she didn't get home till after he did. He was much alarmed, and was telephoning to every likely place he could think of, when she walked in as frightened as he was. In the midst of tears, she told how she had gone on the wrong car and got lost.

Then, the next time, she didn't come home at all.

It was one of those sudden disappearances that happen now and then in a great city like New York. When five million other people don't get lost, it doesn't attract the attention it otherwise would.

Dave Balton hired a private detective. He tried to keep it from the police, on account of the notoriety if the newspapers got hold of it; but he was neither a millionaire nor otherwise prominent, and, when they did, it soon blew over, except in his own heart.

He became an old man for his years, and his neglected business went to the dogs. He kept the little apartment as long as he could for the wife who might still come back to it. He would have it that she had suddenly lost her memory—or, perhaps, her reason—and would some day wake up and come looking for him. Hope is hard to kill.

He hoped for five long years; and when there was no more of his hard-earned money left—for he was not making any more, and detectives don't work for nothing—he took what he could get for his stored household things, and again went West to forget.

IV

GREAT changes had taken place in the years of his absence. He had kept track of things by watching the mining market, but he was little prepared for the cities that had grown out of the sand. Many of the old camps, too, had died out entirely.

He met an old prospector at Goldfield.

"Come over and stop with me a while," said the prospector. "I have a ranch in Death Valley. I've quit mining, and am raising Angora goats."

They went along through Tule Cañon in his machine.

"This is the only way to travel," said Dave's new friend. "Look at some of the others that went along this trail before—on foot—seeking first gold, then water. All the gold in the world wouldn't have bought it for them!"

He was pointing to the bones along the way—bones of man and bones of beast, bleaching under the desert sun.

Dave was surprised when they got to his friend's ranch. It was an oasis in the desert, with plenty of water and vegetation, and plenty of harmless Indians, who did the work about the place in a shiftless, lazy way; for even the oasis was hot.

Sometimes he would go out with his friend and the goats on the hillside. At other times he would take the machine and one or two of the Indians, and go prospecting for some of the fabulous wealth believed to be hidden under the bone-em-

broidered sand. Not that he desired the wealth so much as he desired to find it.

He saw more than one heap of bones that told the story of a tragedy. Here and there were fragments of clothing still clinging to the short brush, where the wearers had discarded first one garment, then another, as they went deeper into the sun-smitten valley, where they finally left everything—even their bones.

He was moving along slowly, his experienced eyes glued to the ground for surface indications, when a sudden tiny red flash from something that he passed made him stop the machine.

"Wait here," he said to the Indian. "I want to go back and look at something."

He was not mistaken. Like a spark of fire, it glowed among the white bones.

He stooped and lifted up one bone that had been a finger. It crumbled as the ring fell off in the hot sand. He picked it up reverently, and he could almost imagine the ruby returned his gaze.

"Poor fellow!" he sighed. "Then you weren't on the boat that went down, after all. You got a few more years out of life; and maybe—"

He looked around at the other bones in the little group. Some belonged to a mule—and some to a dog—and some to a woman.

"Maybe you found the girl to roam the world with you. I'm glad, old chap, you didn't die alone!"

Dropping the ring into his pocket, Dave got down on his knees. He put out both arms around the bones, and scraped all the sand he could over them. He scraped again and again and heaped up the sand until he had them covered.

Then he went over to the woman and started to do the same. A tiny gold chain on the part that had been the neck attracted his attention.

He drew it up out of the sand, and to it was suspended—the other ruby ring!

Tenderly he put it with its mate in his pocket, and went on with his task.

He stayed on his knees after it was finished, and, with the desert sun scorching down on his bare head, tried to say a prayer—of forgiveness. Forgiveness—for the wife who had stolen his ring. Forgiveness—for the friend who had stolen his wife.

A HERMIT'S SONG

I CANNOT envy you your lot—
Acres of stone, one blade of grass;
For every tree or open spot,
Begloomed hives of Babel mass.
I grant the zest of busy streets,
The spur of vying multitudes;
Yet keep your gains and changeful moods
And leave me my defeats!

I cannot envy you your lot—
Furlongs of paint, one petal's bloom;
For every shrub or flowering plot,
A crowded, stifling, gas-lit room.
I grant the thrill of action's call,
The splendor and the spell of art;
Yet keep your magic with your mart
And leave me free from thrall!

I cannot envy you your lot—
Barrels of wine, one drop of dew;
For every gilded blemish, not
A virtue wholly clean or true.
I grant the lure of strife and lilt,
Of alternating toil and dance;
Yet keep your frenzy, zeal, or trance
And leave my cup unspilt!

Richard Butler Glaenser

JOAN THURSDAY*

BY LOUIS JOSEPH VANCE

AUTHOR OF "THE BRASS BOWL," "THE BLACK BAG," "THE BANDBOX," ETC.

XXXVII (*continued*)

AS the door closed between Joan and Matthias Gaunt, each was conscious of the closing of an episode. But it excited in them widely different humors. In that of Joan there was a flavor of resentment. There had really been no necessity for such excessive coolness on his part. He might have shown a little more emotion, she thought. It wasn't as if they hadn't been simply crazy about each other less than a year ago, or as if he knew she was married, as he evidently didn't. She was half sorry she hadn't told him; but she would have relished it more before the break with Quard, when she had been really happy, and could convincingly have conveyed her happiness. Then he might have realized what he had lost.

And it wouldn't have hurt him to promise her a lift toward an engagement, either. She was no longer a novice—in fact, she felt that she was a good deal of an actress, if she could only get a chance to prove it. But, of course, if he was jealous of Marbridge—

She paused in the street, struck by that thought. Marbridge had liked her pretty well. Indeed, he had made no secret of it. She couldn't forget those roses and his calling so often. It was rather a pity she hadn't written to thank him for the flowers, and hard luck that she had been out every time he had tried to see her. Anyhow, there was nothing to stop her from dropping him a line now.

Meanwhile, in the back parlor, Matthias sat at his desk, fumbling with an idle pen, a look of regret in his eyes.

He was rather sorry he hadn't been a little more plain-spoken about Arlington and Marbridge. She was an empty-headed

little thing, but she really ought to keep out of *that* galley. And yet, if he were to attempt it now, she would probably misunderstand him one way or another. He couldn't well afford to let her think that his infatuation had been simply hibernating. He had Venetia to think of now. He had dedicated his life anew to her—to a dumb and quixotic passion. Some day she might need him.

Moreover, if Joan were headed *that* way—toward the Arlington element in the world of the theater—nothing he could do would accomplish anything, except perhaps to accelerate her pace. It was too bad!

But she had given herself to the stage of her own volition. Or was it that she had been designed by nature especially for that business, to which women of her caliber seem so essential? Was she just life-stuff manufactured hastily and carelessly in an old, well-worn mold, because destined only to be shoveled into the insatiable maw of the theater?

Matthias shook his head in weary doubt, sighed, and bent over his work.

XXXVIII

REHEARSALS of "To-morrow's People" had been scheduled to begin on the 23rd of September. Since all the important rôles in the play had been filled before he went away, and Wilbrow had been left in charge of all other details, there was no reason why Matthias should return before the 22nd.

Until he emerged from the wilderness up back of the Allegash country and regained the civilization of Moosehead Lake, he had neither received a letter nor read a newspaper in eight weeks.

Immediately on arriving in New York he telephoned Helena at Tanglewood. Her

* This story began in the December (1912) number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE

news for him was slight but reassuring. Venetia was well, and her boy was developing into a famous ruffian; the two had recently returned from a visit at Tanglewood to the Marbridge cottage at Southampton, the breach between the women having been closed by the birth of the child; Marbridge was in New York—had been there all summer, practically; but Venetia was to reassume charge of his town house within a fortnight.

Relieved, Matthias turned to his play, and for four weeks he was a very busy man. By day he lived in the theater, and he dreamed of it by night. He breathed only the dank and dusty atmosphere of the postscenium; he thought, talked, and wrote only in the terminology of the stage.

Very few facts of the world unconcerned with his play penetrated his intelligence. But one night, at his club, he overheard Gloucester cursing bitterly the evil fortune that had induced him to pledge himself to produce a French farce for Arlington, and to train an incompetent woman for the leading part in the miserable thing. He luridly detailed his trials.

"As far as I can make out," he raved, "she's never played in anything except a bum vaudeville sketch, and I drilled her for that; and yet she's got the nerve to keep picking at my directions on the ground that Tom Wilbrow does things otherwise! I said to her the other day, I said— Eh? Oh, no one you ever heard of. Calls herself Thursday—Joan Thursday. Of course I rowed with Arlington about her, but it didn't do me any good. He just shrugged and grinned and said she *had* to play it, and bet me a thousand over and above my fees that I couldn't put it across. You bet I'll win it! I'll make her act it yet. I could make a Shubert chorus-boy act human, if I wasn't too squeamish to try. Yes, I guess you're right. I saw Marbridge handing her with great care into a taxi in front of the Knick night before last. As you say, fragile!"

At another time the *Telegraph* advised Matthias that "the latest recruit from society, Nella Cardrow," was about to be starred in a comic opera under the management of Arlington. But all such matters were insignificant beside the absorbing fact that his own play was nearing a first presentation. He speculated vaguely about Marbridge; was more than ever sorry for Venetia, wondered how long she would

stand it—and plunged again into his pre-occupation.

At ten minutes to twelve on the night of the 25th of October the last curtain fell upon the first performance of "To-morrow's People"; and an audience in its wraps blocked the aisles till after midnight applauding and demanding the author; who, upon the indistinguishable word of honor of the stage-manager, was not in the house.

Nor was he. Matthias hadn't, in fact, been near it since the curtain rose on the first act. The culmination of the nerve-racking strain of the past month found him without courage to await its issue. He took to the streets and walked himself weary, only to find that instinctively he was always circling back toward the building that housed success or failure for him.

At length, in desperation, hoping to find something able to distract him, he walked into another theater, and stationed himself at the back of the orchestra to watch the last half of another new production.

Under his eyes Gloucester's self-confidence was supremely justified. The farce marched steadily, amid roars of laughter, to a success that was to keep it on Broadway for a year; and through it Joan Thursday moved, a beautiful woman giving an excellent imitation of a finished actress—thanks to the intelligence and persistence of Peter Gloucester. To the initiate of the theater it was apparent that the play carried her, rather than that she insured its success with her art and charm. None the less, it was to be conceded that she had "arrived."

At the close of the performance Arlington responded to prolonged applause in person—leading the gracefully reluctant Joan by the hand—and in a suave and polished speech thanked the audience for its appreciation and a beneficent Providence for according him this opportunity of fixing a new star in the theatrical firmament. The name of "this little girl" would appear in letters of fire, he promised, in front of the theater on the following night.

Marbridge, in a stage-box, and alone, led the applause that followed this announcement.

That same evening, a few blocks north on Broadway, a third initial production was going to everlasting smash and breaking the heart of Nella Cardrow.

Meeting Wilbrow by appointment, half an hour later, at a quiet and non-professional club, Matthias received the news of his own triumph and the congratulations of the cleverest producing director in the country.

"You're a made man now!" Wilbrow told him, with sincere good-will and some little honest envy. "You'll have the pack at your heels, yapping for any old script in your trunk by ten o'clock to-morrow morning!"

"I suppose so," agreed Matthias soberly.

"And the best of that is," continued the producer, "that whatever the temptation, you won't give 'em anything but sound, sane, workmanlike stuff. I don't mind telling you, Gaunt, that I'm proud of having had a hand in putting you before the public."

"Well," Matthias laughed, "I'm proud that you had. If I have my way hereafter—"

"You don't need to worry about *that*!"

"You'll be the only man who will ever stage one of my plays."

It was between one and two when they parted. Matthias walked home in dumb and tense communion with a heart surcharged with humility and gratitude. Venetia would be glad!

There was a taxicab with an open door and a resonant motor in waiting at the curb in front of No. 289. On the stoop a man—apparently its "fare"—was making persistent efforts to overcome the stubborn silence of the door-bell.

Ascending, Matthias regarded him with covert curiosity. He was of a type not unfamiliar to the student of the city; wearing a shoddily smart coat and trousers and a bright red necktie. He turned at the sound of footsteps.

"Hello!" he said brusquely. "You live here? I can't make this blamed bell ring."

"Anything I can do for you?"

"I'm looking for a guy named Gaunt. Maybe you're him?"

"I am," Matthias admitted.

"Then come along." He turned to descend. "You're wanted. I've been sent for you. Hustle!"

"Half a minute," Matthias insisted. "You say you've been sent for me? Who sent you?"

"Marbridge."

"Marbridge!" Was Venetia in need of him? Matthias ran down the steps on the

heels of the messenger. "What's happened? Is Mrs. Marbridge—"

"Jump in," said the other curtly, with his hand on the door. "I'll tell you all I know as soon's we get started."

He nodded to the driver and followed Matthias into the body of the vehicle. At once the car swung round from the curb and darted toward Broadway.

"Well?" demanded Matthias as soon as they were in motion.

"Well," said the other, "Marbridge is shot."

"Good Heavens! Who shot him? Is he seriously wounded?"

"He's got his, all right," said the other in a curious tone of furtive satisfaction. "I dunno who done it—some crazy woman."

"When did it happen? Where?"

"I'm taking you there—down on Madison Avenue—an apartment-house. I guess it must have happened less 'n an hour ago—say half an hour."

"But how—" Matthias checked himself, confused between wonder and horror and an odd sense of having been, somehow, for a long time, prepared for something of the sort.

The other gave him a level look of sharp scrutiny.

"Look here," he demanded, "I take it you ain't no friend of his—Marbridge's?"

"What makes you think that?"

"He did. Said if you wouldn't come, to tell you it was for his wife's sake. You see, he sent me first to find a man named Tankerville, only I couldn't get him either on the phone or at his house. Then he told me to try to get you. That was after I'd rung up his doctor, of course."

"Had the doctor arrived when you left?"

"No, but he was on his way. At that, he can't do much. It's Marbridge's finish, all right. It was coming to him, and he got it."

"But why are you so vindictive?" Matthias insisted. "Who are you?"

"Me? Nobody you know, nor want to. Thursby's my name—Ed Thursby."

"Butch Thursby?" Matthias cried in astonishment.

"What?" the other exclaimed, startled.

"How'd you know *that*?"

"You're Joan Thursday's brother."

Butch was momentarily thoughtful. Then he said with cynic accent:

"Oh, you're another of her friends, are you?"

"I know her. She's told me about you. In fact—well, I wanted to marry her last year, but she preferred to go on the stage."

Butch nodded.

"Sure—that's her all over. Anything for the spot-light and the easy coin!"

"But—I say!" Matthias sat up in the horror of sudden suspicion. "It wasn't Joan?"

"No, it wasn't her. It was some other woman. But Joan was with him when it happened, and that's how I come to mix into the game."

"Do you mind telling me—"

"No, I don't mind. Besides, I'm only beating Marbridge to it by a nose, I guess. And at that, he ain't in shape to do much of a monologue. Got a cigarette? I'm all out."

Matthias handed over his case. Butch helped himself, struck a match, and inhaled deeply.

"It's this way," he observed, returning the case. "The old woman is dying—my mother. She won't last till morning; and before she cashes in, she wants to see Joan. I dunno why; Joan don't give a curse for her—ain't been near us for more'n a year. So I lit out to see if I could tag her. This is about midnight. I know, of course, about where to start looking. I read the papers, and last week the *Telegraph* run a front-page picture of her—star of that show she opened in to-night. Well, the theater's dark when I get there, but I see the night-watchman, and he tells me she's stopping at the Prince Clarence. There they tell me she's just moved to this apartment-house we're going to. So I go there. She's got the ground-floor flat—a doctor's place, yunno—with a separate entrance round the corner. The hall-boy tells me to go around there, and I get there just in time to see Joan open the door and start out yelling bloody murder. I grab her and shut her up, and then we go back into the house and find Marbridge. He's managed to get the gun away from the skirt what done the shooting, and has locked her in a bedroom, where she is having hysterics. Then he slips me a hundred-case note and tells me what to do, and I done it, and—this is the dump."

The taxi was pulling up on a quiet side street near the corner of Madison Avenue. Butch jumped out, told the chauffeur to wait, and ran up the steps of the private entrance. His finger had no more than

touched the bell when the door opened. Matthias followed him in. A white-lipped maid closed the door as he entered.

He received a confused impression of uncommonly luxurious furnishing, even in that narrow entrance-hall. With this, he was conscious of a sound, as from some distant chamber, of muffled but continuous laughter.

"Doctor come?" Butch demanded of the maid.

She nodded nervously, answering in a voice strongly tinged with a French accent:

"Ten minutes ago. He's with the lady now, trying to make her hush. This way, if you please."

She turned the knob of a door to the right. Matthias passed through, Butch immediately following.

He found himself in the dining-room of an apartment of no great proportions, but furnished with striking magnificence. Beneath its central electric dome a small round table shone with a rich splendor of silver, crystal, and damask on dark mahogany. On this a decanter of brandy stood in a puddle of spilt liquor, as if an uncertain hand had poured a drink from it. Near it lay a broken goblet.

On the farther side of the table stood a woman with a young and slender figure, dressed in an elaborate evening gown, holding a goblet half full of brandy and water. Her arms and shoulders were softly lustrous in the glare from the dome, but its shadow blotted out her features. Matthias understood that she was Joan, and that she had paused at the sound of his entrance. She neither moved nor spoke, and for the time being he paid her no further heed, his attention focusing on Marbridge, who was reclining in a softly upholstered wing chair—out of place in the room, and evidently brought in for his accommodation.

His evening coat and waistcoat lay on the floor near the chair. His shirt and undershirt had been ripped and cut away from his right shoulder and chest, exposing his swarthy and hairy bosom and a sort of temporary bandage, which, like his linen, was dark with blood. His feet sprawled uncouthly, and he sat very low in the chair, breathing heavily, with his chin on his chest, and his coarse mouth ajar in a face that had lost much of its dark coloring.

His eyes were closed at first, but a moment or two after Matthias had entered he

opened them and fixed upon Gaunt a heavy and lack-luster stare. With an effort he enunciated a single word:

"Drink!"

As if freed from an enchaining spell by that monosyllable, Joan started, moved swiftly to his side, knelt, and held the goblet to his lips. He drank noisily, gulping; the liquor overflowed at either side of his mouth and dripped in twin streams upon his starched shirt-bosom.

Mechanically Matthias placed his hat on the table. He felt as if he were moving through some vivid phase of nightmare.

Through all this continued the monotonous and awful sound of muffled laughter in another room.

Marbridge ceased to drink. Joan rose and drew away, without looking at Matthias. The wounded man seemed to collect himself at some cost of will-power, and returned to Gaunt his steady, but now less dull, regard.

"Oh, it's you!" he said, speaking slowly, in a low but audible tone. "Well, you'll do. I told that boy to fetch George Tankerville, and then you, if he couldn't find him."

Butch interposed roughly:

"I tried for him, all right, but he wasn't in. So I left a note—sealed. They said he'd be home 'most any time."

Matthias heard himself saying in a loud voice that jarred:

"Good Heavens, Marbridge! How did this happen?"

The wounded man made a slight deprecatory gesture with his left hand.

"You needn't yell. I've been shot. I'm done for."

"No—don't think that—"

"Don't be a fool. I *know*. Doctor says so, too."

"Doctor? Where is he? Why isn't he attending you?"

"He's in—other room, trying to make that—crazy woman shut up. She plugged me and—went into hysterics. We had the devil of a time with her before the doctor came—to keep her from rushing out and giving herself up—getting all this in the papers. All right now. We'll hush it up."

"But—I don't understand—"

"Wait!" said Marbridge heavily. He turned his eyes slowly until he could see Joan, and nodded at her with a curling lip. "You get out," he said harshly.

Butch started.

"That's right," he said in a voice of contempt. "That's your cue for exit. You put on your hat and coat and come home with me. If you've got any coin, bring it; we can use it."

Joan moved suddenly and silently from the room.

"Well, I'll kick along," Butch added, turning to the door.

Marbridge roused.

"You understand you're to keep quiet?"

Butch laughed quietly.

"I'm hep all right. You needn't worry. I'll keep my mouth shut for my sister's sake—though she ain't worth it."

He nodded easily to Matthias and left the room.

"Give me more brandy," Marbridge demanded. "Be stingy with the water. I've got to—hold out a couple of hours longer."

When Matthias had served him and he had drunk again, he resumed with more animation.

"Listen. It's Nella Cardrow making that row in there. I chucked her a while ago, and then to-night her play went to pieces and she lost her head. Used to meet her here. So she had key. Came—let herself in without the maid's knowledge—shot me as we came in. I got the gun away from her before she could turn it on herself—locked her in room. Then—hysterics. I'm finished. Well, it was coming to me, I guess. No—no remorse bunk—but I know I've been a pretty rotten bouncer. Never mind. Nobody must suffer for this but me. That's where you come in—you and George Tankerville. You've got to fix it up—buy silence of everybody involved. Doctor's all right, and my chauffeur and Sara—the maid. Give 'em enough, and they'll die before they tell. Doctor'll fix death certificate, all right, and undertaker. That'll be all right. But you got to get that Cardrow fool home and see she keeps still. And me—I got to die in the house. I mean, my own house."

His chin dropped again. He shivered.

There was a slight sound at the door. Matthias turned to find that George Tankerville had slipped into the room.

XXXIX

IN the smiling face of a golden Sunday morning in July the woman frowned slightly and sighed with discontent. She was an extremely pretty woman, and wore an elaborate Parisian boudoir gown, which

struck a note of exquisite color on the sun-swept veranda of a cottage overlooking the Great South Bay.

The newspaper which she had been reading lay where she had permitted it to fall a moment ago, on the floor beneath the couch hammock in which she was half reclining, supported by an elbow. One pretty foot, from which a satin mule dangled, occasionally touched the flooring, causing the hammock to sway languidly. Several brilliant diamond rings blazed on her fingers, and she wore a diamond circlet of startling magnificence round one of her pretty, half-naked arms.

So still and warm was the morning that she was uncomfortably conscious of its oppression, in spite of the slightness of her negligee, which possessed no quality of reticence. There was a faint dew of perspiration on her brow, and a slightly hectic color tinged her smooth, plump cheeks. Between her burning lips a white tooth showed, barely perceptible, nipping the lower lip; and in her eyes was a dull glow of smoldering ennui.

As the hammock moved, its supports protested with almost inaudible creakings; and there was an intermittent tapping of the heel of her mule upon the boards.

The man in the basket chair on the other side of the hammock scowled over his newspaper until his irritation exploded.

"For the love of Mike!" he protested sourly. "Can't you quit that racket, Joan? You ought to know what my nerves are in the morning."

The woman, with her face averted, smiled a smile of secret satisfaction. If she was bored, he was no less so; but her tones rang true and sweet as she answered him.

"Very well, George. Why didn't you say so before?"

George Arlington, engaged in lighting a cigarette, merely grunted in response, and gave himself anew to his newspaper. Joan, with another sigh, followed his example, picking up the sheet she had dropped and glancing again down its columns.

When she had run through Len Fox's column for the second time, had made sure that she had missed nothing of its entertainment, and had wondered for the hundredth time what it was that he found so immensely diverting in his everlasting lampooning of Eddie Timmermann, she rattled the paper and turned it noisily, in the hope

of annoying Arlington to the point of a second outbreak. But he said nothing, and she read the head-lines with diminishing interest, until, near the bottom of the page, she found one which furnished her with a dull and fugitive thrill.

PLAYWRIGHT MARRIES WIDOW

Matthias Gaunt, Novelist and Dramatist,
Wedded to Mrs. Venetia Marbridge.

Last Thursday, in this city, there was privately celebrated the marriage of Matthias Gaunt, author of "To-morrow's People" and other successful plays, to Mrs. Venetia Marbridge, widow of Vincent Marbridge, once well-known as a first-nighter, whose death occurred something over two years ago from an unsuccessful operation for appendicitis. The newly married couple sailed for London yesterday on the *Mauretania*, where Mr. Gaunt will supervise the English production of "To-morrow's People," his first American success.

The newspaper slipped from Joan's indifferently grasp. Caught in a newly sprung breeze, it scudded boisterously over the veranda and to the lawn. Arlington looked up with another frown, but said nothing; and Joan was paying no heed to him just then. She was thinking.

She was thinking that she had always known there was something between those two, and that they'd been very cute about it to keep it quiet for so long.

Not that she cared! It was nothing to her, thank goodness, and she wasn't a woman to hold a grudge, even if Matty had refused to write a play for her when George made him an offer last winter. She guessed he was still sore on account of the way she'd thrown him over; probably he never would get over it. Naturally it had been up to him to pretend he didn't care, that day when she called on him; but that, of course, was before she'd made her hit.

All the same, it would have been nice if George could have induced him to write a play around her amiable and attractive personality, because he was the one American dramatist who struck twelve three times out of four; and anything would have been preferable to this revamped adaptation from the French in which Arlington was proposing to put her out next fall. She knew in her soul that it wasn't any good and would fail, and she half suspected Arlington did, too, and rather banked on her coming a cropper with it.

That would be a good excuse for a break. He was getting tired of her, she knew; and she had been tired of him, lo, these many months.

She turned her head lazily to look at him. Certainly he was still a well-set-up figure of a man. Of course, he showed his age—he must be over forty-five—in the grayish streaks in his hair and the yellow blotches beneath his eyes every morning, and in the increasingly meticulous care he bestowed upon his person to keep it fresh and fragrant. Somebody ought to put him wise to the fact that he was getting just a little mature for boyish yachting flannels and lavender ties and silk socks to match.

But it wasn't any of her business. Unless all signs failed, he was going to take himself off her conscience pretty soon. Kind friends whispered that he was just crazy about that fat-faced doll, Queenie Quix. Well, it would be a good riddance, from Joan's point of view.

She wouldn't be old for years yet—she was less than twenty-two—not for many, many years. And she was prettier to-day than she had ever been. Everybody admitted that, even those who didn't think she was much of an actress. But that, of course, was because she wasn't getting the plays she ought to have, properly to exploit her art and her temperament.

She would get the plays before long—particularly if she were lucky enough to get rid of Arlington—who was really beginning to run a little behind the times—and hitch up with some younger and more enterprising manager.

Oh, she would get the plays! People would always write them for a star who could draw ten to fourteen thousand a week, even on the road. And after all, the plays didn't matter much. It was personality that counted.

What did the opinions of the critics amount to, anyway? She was a success!

THE END

TWO WOMEN'S LIVES

ONCE—only once—she listened to the voice
Of the arch-tempter. Tender was her heart;
And wiles of sin to her young maidenhood
Were all unknown; her weak defenses broke,
And then her world crashed round her. Argus eyes
Thronged all the highways, and the hedges swarmed
With Peeping Toms; so with her shame she fled
Into the desert place to shrive her soul.
And there she dwelt obscurely, giving up
Her nights and days to prayer. Cleanly she lived,
Cleanly she wrought. The fresh young morning sang
Tidings to her of healing, and the dusk,
Cool-bosomed, pure, breathed messages of peace.
Thus slipped the years away; forgot of men,
Austere and sweet, she walked on life's high slopes
Alone with God.

Another woman dwelt
In splendor where the great city's endless streets
Throb with the clamor of their myriad life.
And she was fair, with eyes like midnight stars;
And jewels blazed upon her smooth, white throat,
And her rich garments rustled as she moved.
But evil, like a serpent, all unseen,
Coiled at her feet, and when with venomous fangs
It struck, struck in the dark. And so the world,
Unwitting, courted her with flattering words,
And in her presence bowed obsequiously.
Like a proud queen, enriching with a smile,
Dishonoring with a frown, imperiously
She swayed her realm. The victims of her lust
Crept silently away to hide their hurts,
And made no sign. Haughtily still she rules,
Glutting desire in secret; fools still fawn
Upon her; still her beauty dazzles all,
But, deep within, her soul is black as death!

James B. Kenyon

THE STAGE

VAIN CODDLING OF LONDON PLAYS

IF plays in London don't prosper—and most of them don't—it is no fault of the newspapers. The publicity accorded the theaters in England is calculated to make an American manager's eyes stand out with amazement and envy. In New York, a new play may be announced in a paragraph, under a single head. On the day after the production there is a review of the performance, of anywhere from a column to half that length, with two or three head-lines. This done, there is absolute silence save for a line or two in the theatrical section announcing the closing of the play, or a change in its cast.

In London, how different! Take "Typhoon," for instance. It had been running at the Haymarket for something like six weeks to fair audiences, when I picked up an evening paper, and there on the front page, marked "special," and beneath a deep head-line box, I found a two-column eulogy of the piece, captioned "The Triumph of 'Typhoon.'"

The same thing was done not long since for "The Yellow Jacket," and, as matter of fact, it is usual with most London productions. And still the theaters proper are not full, and the managers are complaining even more loudly than their American *confrères*.

After all, this piling on of printers' ink



SIR JOHNSTON FORBES-ROBERTSON IN THE TITLE-RÔLE OF "HAMLET," WHICH WAS INCLUDED IN THE REPERTORY OF HIS FAREWELL TOUR

From a photograph by Lizzie Cassell Smith, London

may serve as a boomerang in the way of making the public distrust newspaper comment on theatrical offerings. The other day I was chatting with a playgoer—one of the average sort, an engaged man who frequently takes his *fiancée* to the theater, and always pays for his seats.

"How do you pick your plays?" I inquired. "From the notices?"

"Never!" the Englishman replied with great emphasis.

"Oh, by the star, then?" I hazarded.

"Not necessarily," he answered. "Very often by the theater."

"Well," I went on, calling to mind one of the newest offerings at the time, "what about 'The Chaperon'?" Do you fancy you would like that?"

"I am sure I should," broke in the young lady who goes to the theater with him. "There is such a lovely poster for it!"

Possibly this gushing of journalistic sweetness over the drama may be partly due to the strictness of the English libel laws.



IRIS HOEY, IN THE LONDON PRESENTATION OF THE MUSICAL COMEDY "OH! OH! DELPHINE"

From a photograph by Ellis & Walery, London



EVELYN D'ALROY, A VERSATILE ENGLISH ACTRESS WHO HAS PLAYED NADINA IN "THE CHOCOLATE SOLDIER" AND OBERON IN "A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM," AND WHO WAS RECENTLY IN "TURANDOT," A CHINESE PLAY GIVEN AT THE ST. JAMES IN LONDON

From a photograph by Ellis & Walery, London

London newspaper writers seldom or never express opinions reflecting in any way on the personalities of the people talked about, unless in the way of compliment. In the "Typhoon" article already cited, the reporter who interviewed Laurence Irving, the leading man, quotes the actor as saying:

I have also had sent to me a Japanese paper in which there are a portrait of me and a pic-

ture of one of the stage groups. It recalls the remark of Mr. Yoshio Markino, who said that I reminded him of the Japanese tragedian Danjiro, the Japanese Irving. It is a most favorable notice all through.

Pretty fulsome self-laudation, surely, to be let pass without a word of comment!

Many of London's first nights fall on Saturday, with an idea of accommodating



CICELY STUCKEY, IN "THE GIRL AND THE TAXI" AT THE LYRIC IN LONDON

From a photograph by Ellis & Watery, London

the critics of the daily newspapers, which are not issued on Sunday. This gives the reviewers a whole day in which to write their notices. Naturally there is a wild scramble among the managers for a Saturday *première*, and when the night has been preempted, another producer will start his performance earlier on the same evening, with an eye single to the critics' comfort.

NEW WAYS OF HONORING SHAKESPEARE

The scheme for the erection of a National Theater as a memorial to Shakespeare in

connection with the three hundredth anniversary of his death, in 1916, has made but little progress since its inception five years ago. The committee reported at a meeting in mid May, and a letter from Sir Herbert Tree was read, in which he made this suggestion:

Should sufficient capital for some permanent building not be forthcoming, the fund might still be applied to the less ornamental, but perhaps even more useful, object of endowing the performance of classical plays in the metropolis and the great provincial centers.

Tree himself is a most persistent producer of Shakespeare, and apparently finds it profitable. Every spring he gives a Shakespeare festival at His Majesty's.

Henry Arthur Jones did not hesitate to

Something of a novelty in a Shakespeare presentation has just had a month's showing at the Prince of Wales's Theater, where Martin Harvey revived "The Taming of the Shrew" in a fashion that may be set



PHYLLIS MONKMAN, WHO IS IN THE BLACK AND WHITE DANCE IN "EIGHTPENCE A MILE,"
THE NEW REVUE AT THE LONDON ALHAMBRA

From a photograph by Ellis & Walery, London

hold up the failure of the New Theater experiment in New York as a horrible example.

"The American National Theater," he said, "will remain as a warning to us to proceed cautiously."

down as a cross between the elaborate outfitting of a Tree and the bare stage effects of the Elizabethan realists. He built a new stage which covered the footlights, and Christopher Sly watched the whole proceedings from the front. They were well

worth watching, too, the ensemble work of the company being of especial effectiveness.

Mr. Harvey's *Petruchio* was a less emphatic impersonation than one is wont to expect, but then he was somewhat handicapped by his *Katherine* in the person of his wife, Miss N. de Silva, who lacks the necessary force for such a rôle. But Mr. Harvey is to be commended for omitting the riding-whip which so many other *Petruchios* have swished through the air to affright their shrewish spouses.

In this version there was but one interval, and the street scenes were represented by screens run forth upon rollers from either wing. This concentration of the action lent a lively pace to the comedy, with which good-sized audiences gave every evidence of being greatly pleased.

Mr. Harvey proposes to follow the "Shrew" with a production of Knoblauch's "The Faun," which William Faversham did in New York some three years since, thus adding another to the



MARY RIDLEY, SINGING THE LEADING PART IN "THE SUNSHINE GIRL" ON TOUR IN ENGLAND

From a photograph by Rita Martin, London



PEGGY GREENAUGH, ONE OF THE AMERICAN BEAUTIES IN "COME OVER HERE"
AT THE LONDON OPERA HOUSE

From a photograph

many theatrical offerings in London with an American history behind them.

A POOR COMEDY AND A GOOD OPERETTA

So far as I can make out, the only inducement for Ethel Warwick's adventure into management with "The Cap and Bells," by Robert Vansittart, is the fact that the piece had only six characters and one set. It lasted at the Little Theater some five weeks. The wonder is that it did not talk itself to death sooner. But there were an earl, a duke, and two ladies of

rank in the short cast, and so the fashionable set that is supposed to frequent Gertrude Kingston's tiny playhouse—which is not nearly so attractive as Winthrop Ames's of similar title in New York—laughed on the slightest provocation. It seemed strange that such piffle could entertain sane people.

The thread of the plot in "The Cap and Bells" concerns the love of *Lady Clara* for a plain *Percy Robinson*, who engineers an unsuccessful strike. In the last act she throws herself at his head. He declines her advances, she persists, and when it is past



HEATHER FEATHERSTONE, WHO IS SARI, ONE OF THE SISTERS IN "THE SEVEN SISTERS"
AT THE SAVOY IN LONDON

From a photograph by Rita Martin, London

time for the final curtain to drop, they shoot into each other's arms for no other apparent reason. Truly the British stage must be in a parlous state when nonsense of this description can glimpse the footlight bulbs!

I fancy that Miss Warwick, who has a good manner but rather an unsympathetic voice, must be a suffragette, and must have accepted the piece because of the chance it gave her to propose. She is assuredly

versatile, for I note that her repertory extends all the way from the name-part in Hauptmann's "Hannele" to an appearance in "The Merry Widow."

At Daly's, which housed Lehar's most famous opera for its long London run, there now flourishes "The Marriage Market," also out of Vienna, but with the scene transferred in the English version—made by Gladys Unger—to California. I was reminded of last winter's "Red Petticoat"

at the New York Daly's, when cowboys with the traditional garb and swagger invaded the stage, seeming strangely out of place so close to Leicester Square. But I predict that they will stay there for several months to come. The overflowing audience on the second night was delighted with it all, from the tuneful yet not unambitious score by Victor Jacobi to the collection of real boys for the midshipmites.

To be sure, there is the usual "silly ass" lord, without whom, apparently no London musical comedy can get along, but he is made amusing by G. P. Huntley, a favorite on both sides of the Atlantic. The lord's valet, *Blinker*, really has more to do, and W. H. Berry does it with a gusto that justifies his being bracketed under an "and" with Mr. Huntley in the house-bill.

Sadi Petrass, fresh from "Gipsy Love," was doubtless more realistic with her accent in that atmosphere than she is as the American millionaire's daughter in "The Marriage Market"; she has great charm and a good voice, so much can be forgiven. Gertie Millar, drafted from "The Dancing Mistress" at the Adelphi for the newer production, is her usual engaging and light-footed self.

A MILLIONAIRE'S PLAY ABOUT HIMSELF

The cable carried to America news of the row over Baron Henri de Rothschild's play, "Cræsus" immediately preceding its production. No fewer than three nationalities were mixed up in the affair, for the author originally wrote his drama in French; Mr. Hansen, who had arranged to present it for the first time on any boards, is American; and Arthur Bouchier, who was to enact the name-part, is, of course, English.

The exact basis of the fracas has not been made public, but it is known that there were quarrels over the rehearsals, and Mr. Hansen is said to have declared that if the piece were produced as they were arranging to do it, failure was inevitable. Mr. Bouchier, on the other hand, big man though he is, declared he was in fear of his life from the American, and wished him bound over to keep the peace. All of which might be beside the mark in writing down a report of a new production had I not seen the play—which was offered on the date originally set, with Mr. Hansen *not* concerned—and discovered that most of the action must have been confined to the row aforesaid.

What the piece may have been like before it was translated into English I do not know, and M. Rothschild has most commendably kept out of all the alarums and excursions over his brain-child. One can sense, however, that he wrote the thing *con amore*, for one reads between the lines how keenly he feels the heart-breaking penalties attached to being a multimillionaire. A rich man's desire to be loved for himself alone is the theme, and *Count Sorbier* is represented as the prey of every designing acquaintance of either sex. A capital character is that of *Vicomte de Fonsac*, an old roué and persistent bore, who goes about cadging for money ostensibly needed for sick relatives, but actually to be squandered on his female friends.

For the rest, the drama falls apart in the middle. The heroine, well played by a French actress, Gabrielle Dorziat, appears only in the first two acts. Another girl is introduced for the third, thus requiring the audience to pump up interest afresh. A good scene in the second act is provided by *Sorbier's* interview with his batch of callers, all eager for pelf. There comes a very disappointing climax, however, when, with much previous locking of doors and pulling down of blinds, he goes to the bookcase up-stage, presses a button, and reveals a grill-work through which one glimpses a safe. And out of this he takes—what do you suppose?—a slouch hat and an old coat, the donning of which, without any further change, is supposed to disguise the noted plutocrat.

In this attire we see him mixing on familiar terms with some middle-class folk, among them *Yvonne Pinchard*, a work-girl whom he has met in a public park. But a caller happens to recognize him, and again the fat is in the fire, for at once it is quite apparent *Yvonne* is like all the rest and cannot think of him apart from his wealth. So the play ends with *Sorbier's* quest still unachieved.

LONDON LIKES "WITHIN THE LAW"

A cordial welcome has been extended to Bayard Veiller's "Within the Law" at the Haymarket Theater, where it would seem to have every chance of scoring a good run. It required two men, Frederick Fenn and Arthur Wimperis, to fit this melodrama of the department-store and the crook to the English stage. The changes were both necessary and judicious—wherein they

differ from the footless alterations which last winter ruined the British-made "Chains" in shifting the scene to America.

The biggest transformation in "Within the Law" transfers the final scene from police headquarters to *Mary Turner's* flat, the same as in the second act. This is quite essential, for the third-degree methods of the American police do not obtain in Great Britain. The new matter introduced in consequence has been skilfully worked in, and rounds out the play with a whirlwind finish.

I note a loss, however, in the sea change that omits the clock-tower flash of light in the third act, revealing to the inspector the previously unsuspected fact that a dead man's body is lying on the floor of the room. The necessary result is achieved in London rather awkwardly, by making *Gentleman Jim*, not quite dead, turn over with an expiring groan that betrays him to the man from Scotland Yard.

Sir Herbert Tree, under whose auspices the play was produced, provides a fine cast. Jane Cowl's part goes to Edyth Goodall, who originated the lead in "Hindle Wakes," while the slang of the sleek *Aggie* falls to Mabel Russell, hitherto in musical comedy. The work of these two is received by the audiences with real enthusiasm.

As to the notices, the *Daily Telegraph* devoted more than a column to its review, leading off with the statement that the play "was very vehement and very wonderful," and summing up:

"Within the Law" is a melodrama of extraordinary efficiency.

Both critics and public appear to have been agreeably surprised to find such a liberal allowance of melodrama in a play whose first act led them to fear that they were to get only the same old problem pabulum after all.

THE ADDED ACT OF "TYPHOON"

Apropos of the Haymarket, I should say a word or two about personal impressions of "Typhoon," recently transferred from these boards to the Queen's. This powerful piece from the Hungarian, in the version for London made by Laurence Irving, is in four acts instead of the three played in America by Walker Whiteside. It gains a good deal by the addition, even so far as to include a touch of comedy. The added scene shows the room of the investigating

judge, whose scenting of a mystery in the confession of the self-sacrificing Japanese is capitally conveyed by Arthur Whitby.

The *Takeramo* of Mr. Irving is a creation carried through with assiduous care by an actor who seems to enjoy the part more than any other that he has played. And he has mounted the piece with infinite painstaking. When "Within the Law" was announced for the Haymarket, the public naturally jumped to the conclusion that this meant the end of "Typhoon's" run, which had started April 2. Several people wrote to the newspapers deploring the fact that the prevailing theatrical taste should cause frivolous *revues* to flourish and condemn so fine a thing as "Typhoon" to die. Thus encouraged, Mr. Irving arranged the transfer to the Queen's. But the mere sight of these letters of protest would be sufficient to keep many people away from an offering which evidently stands in need of private boosts.

Meanwhile the other Oriental play in London—"The Yellow Jacket"—is still at the Duke of York's, where it began late in March. It may possibly be followed by "Tosca," with Kathryn Kaelred and J. H. Benrimo in the leading parts.

NOVEL FEATURE IN WEAK COMEDY

H. V. Esmond, who has arranged to take "Eliza Comes to Stay" to America next year, recently undertook to tell the *Evening News* why some plays fail. He said that many good ones miss the mark, not because they are not well made, but because their motive does not happen to appeal to the popular taste. This, however, does not take us very far, unless Mr. Esmond can explain why a piece makes or fails to make the necessary appeal.

It is not difficult to say why "Yours" is not likely to make a brilliant record. It does not stick to the track, but wanders far afield, and is neither comedy, farce, nor melodrama, though it has something of all three elements. This is the new piece put on at the Vaudeville by Hilda Trevelyan and Edmund Gwenn, to follow their hundred-night revival of Pinero's "Schoolmistress." Wilfred T. Coleby and Sydney Blow wrote the thing, and distinct novelty adheres to its main adjunct—an animal-shop which supplies the scene for the second act. But there is so much else in the plot that doesn't count, and so very little of the main story that does, that one

is not inclined to wonder at the beggarly array of empty benches.

Miss Trevelyan—who used to act Maude Adams's parts for Frohman in London—calls on *Lady Worth* at curtain rise to announce that her grandfather has left his animal-shop by will to her ladyship's son, *Arthur Worth, M. P.* Here is a chance for good farce, one would think, but the authors must needs drag in a would-be suicide, who is made partner in the shop, and nearly wrecks it because he conceives such a love for the animals that he will not sell any of them except the snakes.

Miss Trevelyan may have been prejudiced in her present choice of a vehicle, Mr. Blow being her husband.

THE WEST END'S THIRTY-THIRD THEATER

To the list of London's thirty-two West End theaters—which includes Covent Garden opera-house, but excludes the Hippodrome and the music-halls—was added one more on June 5. Truth to tell, reckoned strictly on the basis of supply and demand, it was no more necessary than is the thirteenth child in a poor man's family; but this side of the matter never enters into a capitalist's mind when he wants to build a playhouse.

The new theater, the Ambassadors, is a tiny place in a back street. Its interior is inviting in its white and gold, and to justify its name it has a row of national coats of arms blazoned above the proscenium arch.

The play with which Mr. Durrant Swan made his first bid for favor just misses being a really striking piece of work. It is remarkable as coming from an Anglo-Saxon typewriter, for it possesses all the ear-marks of the Latin freedom from restraint. Monckton Hoffe wrote it, the man whose "Little Damsel" made so favorable an impression when it was imported to New York some three seasons ago.

First and foremost, there is no skimping, for the piece gives us twenty-three characters and four acts, each of them requiring a different set. The first, which might well have been called a prologue, shows a shallow-hearted, pretentious English family dwelling on the coast of Northumberland. The son, twenty-eight and a composer, is a round peg in a square hole, and gets on with his wife *Cynthia* no better than he does with the rest of the family.

A vessel goes ashore near the house, and

feeling that they are called on to do something for the shipwrecked passengers, the *Mordaunts* offer to take in one of the survivors. They draw a firebrand in the shape of *Panthea*, a political prisoner, who promptly falls in love with *Gerard*, the musical son, and persuades him to run away with her that very night. From this you may imagine how swiftly things move in this very unusual play.

The second act, two years later in a Continental city, finds the elopers still happy in their unconventional relation, the only fly in the ointment being the difficulty of finding a producer for *Gerard's* opera. By chance *Panthea* falls in with an old acquaintance, a noted impresario, and him she persuades to stage the opera, but not until she has promised to become his mistress for a month. He agrees to kill himself at the end of that period, having already expressed his weariness of life, now that the supply of his favorite cognac is exhausted.

This is decidedly unpleasant, and not particularly new, but the whole thing, impossible as it may seem, is so cleverly told that the bald melodrama is snugly hidden behind the sugar-coating. It is in his third act that Mr. HOFFE strikes his weak note—needlessly, too, it appears to me. He uses *Gerard's* good friend *Pablo* to bring matters to a crisis by hearing rumors of *Panthea's* compact, and by charging the old impresario, a regular *Baron Chevrial*, with the fact, which the latter calmly admits.

Thereupon *Pablo* deliberately sets out to make trouble by informing *Gerard*. One would have thought Mr. HOFFE could have brought about his dénouement more cleverly. But there is worse to come; for when *Gerard*, not understanding the whole truth, deserts her, *Panthea* snatches a knife from the table at which they have been celebrating the triumph of the opera, and stabs the impresario in the back, sharing poison with *Gerard* in the last act in a babes-in-the-wood finale.

For a play that begins so well, the ending is most disappointing. One feels that the writer has hopelessly mixed his genres; but so well is the piece acted at the Ambassadors that the onlooker is almost hypnotized into admiration. The *Panthea* is a Norwegian actress, Lillemore Halvorsen, who seems born for the part, and has made something of a sensation in it.

Matthew White, Jr.

FINANCIAL DEPARTMENT

MISTAKES OF MILLIONAIRES

WIDE-SPREAD attention has been attracted in financial circles and elsewhere to the appraisal of the estates of Edward H. Harriman and Colonel John Jacob Astor. The work was undertaken by the State of New York for the purpose of assessing transfer taxes upon the property left by the two late multimillionaires, and in consequence the results have the accuracy and authority of official records.

The Astor fortune was returned at a valuation of \$87,216,691, while the worth of the Harriman estate was placed at \$69,686,654. The latter, though the smaller of the two, is the more remarkable and interesting, for the huge sum of almost seventy millions of dollars was amassed by Mr. Harriman in the comparatively brief space of eleven years. Colonel Astor's fortune, on the other hand, was a matter of inheritance, the basis of which was laid more than a century ago.

The magnitude of these fortunes appeals strongly to the imagination. It is easy to understand why "fiscal agents" and promoters of prospectus companies, in their efforts to sell get-rich-quick securities to inexperienced people, habitually conjure with the names of wealthy individuals or corporations.

We venture to say that the mere mention of the Astor fortune, and of the fact that it was derived from enhanced values of New York real estate, has influenced more sales of worthless New Jersey swamp land and Long Island sand and scrub-oak tracts than any other single cause. Irresponsible "villa site" companies never omit some reference to the Astor estate in their literature. It has lured simple-minded souls, living in remote parts of the country, into buying waste land ninety miles from New York under the impression that they were "investing as the Astors invested," and were acquiring land in the "metropolitan

district," carrying with it a sure title to a prospective fortune.

Similarly, we have encountered Mr. Harriman's name in hundreds of prospectuses, where it usually figures in connection with some alleged statement that he was "not a five-per-cent man."

That even wealthy and successful men make serious mistakes in investing money is clearly indicated by the schedules filed with the appraisal of the Astor and Harriman estates. They show that no matter how rich a man may be, he cannot afford to take chances or disregard sound principles of investment.

For instance, many parcels of property owned by Colonel Astor were shown to be vacant yielding no income whatever. Through changing conditions in New York, other parcels had depreciated until their true worth was far below the valuations assessed for taxing purposes. But the most interesting feature of the Astor and Harriman schedules was the disclosure of the fact that both millionaires had invested large sums of money in securities which were wholly worthless.

Far-sighted and resourceful as Mr. Harriman was as a financier, daring and successful as he was as a speculator and market manipulator, he made mistakes. In his strong box were found stocks and bonds of a nominal par value of about four million dollars, but actually worth the paper on which they were printed and no more. Many of the securities bear the names of companies strongly suggestive of prospectus concerns, such as the Safety Train Signal Company, Sodus Bay Elevator, Planters' Compress, Standard Beet Sugar, Depew Improvement, Sinnemahoning Iron and Coal, and Trophy Mining.

In the schedules of Colonel Astor's estate there appear stocks and bonds of the "cat and dog" variety to the amount of more than a million dollars. Securities of various companies form eighty-nine separate items in the appraisal, out of which no

NOTE—All matter in this department was written before the end of June.

fewer than thirty-nine were returned as worthless, or having only a nominal value. These include shares in the Atmospheric Products Company; International Power Storage Company; Mutual Automatic Telephone Company; Tramway Power and Storage Company; Ampere Electro Company; Commercial Bank of Honduras; New York and Pennsylvania Brick, Tile, and Terra Cotta Company; Little Kana-wha and Elk River Petroleum and Mining Company; Humboldt Railroad Gold and Silver Company; and other obscure and mysterious things.

Mr. Harriman and Colonel Astor are by no means the only men of wealth who have made unfortunate investments. To the contrary, securities in absurd concerns strongly suggestive of the get-rich-quick variety are continually turning up in the estates of multimillionaires.

It is recalled that so shrewd an operator as the late Russell Sage, who died in 1906, left worthless truck to the amount of fifteen hundred thousand dollars, par value, in his estate of sixty-six millions. The estate of Jay Gould, who died in 1892, was appraised at about seventy-five millions. It contained worthless securities to the nominal amount of two and one-half million dollars.

Among the valueless securities left by the late Edward Hawley, whose gross estate was in the neighborhood of ten million dollars, were twenty-five thousand shares of such stuff as American Railway Industrial Straw Products Company, fourteen thousand shares of the Strauss Manufacturing Company, and a host of other things returned as worthless.

Nothing speaks more impressively of the necessity for caution in investment than the fact that some of the shrewdest financiers of the day have sustained losses running into the millions through ill-advised ventures. Such losses were not fatal with them, because of their abundant wealth, and the employment of a large part of it in better things; but many of their "investments" would have crippled men of smaller means.

The moral is obvious. No man can afford to disregard the sound principles of investment, whether he is rich or poor. He may count his wealth in millions, but unless, in selecting securities, he considers the safety of his principal first, interest yield second, and marketability third, he will

lose his money as quickly as any inexperienced investor in the land.

INVESTMENTS FOR WOMEN

IN an address before the Bankers' Club of Detroit, Michigan, Joseph T. Talbert, vice-president of the National City Bank of New York, recently delivered an impressive warning against the spend-thrift tendencies of the times. Among the examples of improvidence and waste that he employed in emphasizing his remark, we find the following statement credited to an official of an important corporation:

"A well-known life insurance company has been following up all its death losses of five thousand dollars and over. As a result of its investigation it finds that after seven years ninety per cent of the beneficiaries have lost or spent the entire amount paid to them."

It is an accepted fact that most beneficiaries of the life insurance companies are women, and it is deplorable that so large a proportion of the funds provided for their necessities by years of striving and economy on the part of others should so speedily be dissipated. That this is due in great part to their unfamiliarity with business affairs cannot be doubted. The temptations and promises of high interest rates seem well-nigh irresistible to women. They are easily led into injudicious investments, and fall ready victims to plausible stock salesmen and swindling company-promoters.

These observations suggest the "woman's investment" as a timely topic. A consideration of the question is also prompted by the letter of a timid woman who confesses herself afraid to trust her own judgment in the matter of buying securities. Over the initials O. E. S. she writes from Springfield, Massachusetts, as follows:

Will you kindly suggest what in your judgment is an absolutely safe investment for a woman who realizes the uncertainties of many securities and is afraid to rely upon her own judgment? The fund at her disposal is about three thousand dollars, upon the income of which she is partly dependent for her support.

What is there yielding at least five per cent with no risk, and is it advisable to buy securities at this time?

We cannot, of course, foretell price fluctuations, and we repeat what we said in an article entitled "When To Buy Bonds," which appeared in the June issue—that in

choosing securities, price and income yield should always be subordinated to safety. If a woman keeps that point ever in mind, she will make no costly mistakes.

As to the present as a time to buy securities, we will say that the best bonds in the country are on a very attractive interest basis and lower in price than they have been in many years. As such, we believe well-secured issues are desirable for purchase around prevailing quotations.

An expectancy of five per cent with a high degree of safety is not unreasonable under the changed conditions of the investment market. Capital is worth more the world over. As a result there has been a general readjustment of prices and values. This has proceeded very rapidly in recent months, and legal investments of the highest grade, such as New York City issues and Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul general mortgage bonds, are now selling upon an interest basis of four and one-half per cent. Only a few years ago they paid no more than three to three and one-half per cent.

All other securities have adjusted themselves in their related scale. In consequence, many highly desirable securities, though not quite up to the legal standard, can be bought to yield as high as five to five and one-half per cent. Indeed, a rate somewhat higher than this may be obtained, in instances, without undue risk, if an investor is willing to forego something of ready marketability. Of such, however, the only forms that we should recommend to a woman would be a good real-estate mortgage, mortgage bond, or certificate.

We have no wish to be hypercritical over an employment of words and phrases, but we may say to our correspondent that no action in life is wholly void of risk. We very much doubt if in the strictest literal interpretation there is such a thing as an "absolutely safe investment." There are countless securities which we believe will never default in interest or principal, but we cannot be assured that they may not decline in price.

For example, British consols and United States government four-per-cents were regarded as absolutely safe securities a dozen or fifteen years ago. They are equally safe to-day, for there is no question about the interest or the principal; but in the intervening years consols have declined thirty-six points and United States four-per-cents

about twenty-three points. One who bought these obligations at the high figures, and has suffered from their heavy depreciation, might well be pardoned for regarding them as unstable securities.

Bonds which conform to the standard of a savings-bank or trust investment in New York and the leading New England States afford the highest degree of security we know. Of these issues, however, few, if any, give an income as high as five per cent. Unless our correspondent desires to employ her money as a savings-bank invests its funds, in accordance with legal restrictions designed to assure the protection of its depositors, it is unnecessary for her to limit her selection to savings-bank bonds. She can exercise more latitude and obtain a higher interest return without going beyond the bounds of prudence.

Among bonds which are now selling at prices that yield to the purchaser five per cent or a trifle more, the following are well-secured obligations, or are otherwise to be classed as desirable from the high standing of the issuing corporations, and we believe them to be safe within the ordinary acceptance of the term:

Brooklyn Union Elevated 5s, due 1949; price, about 100; income yield, 5 per cent.

Chicago, St. Paul, Minneapolis and Omaha debenture 5s, due 1930; price, about 98; income yield, 5.12 per cent.

Colorado and Southern refunding mortgage 4½s, due 1935; price, about 91; income yield, 5.20 per cent.

American Telephone and Telegraph collateral trust 4s, due 1929; price, about 88; income yield, 5.10 per cent.

Armour & Co. first real estate 4½s, due 1939; price, about 90; income yield, 5.20 per cent.

Central Leather Company gold mortgage 5s, due 1925; price, about 94; income yield, 5.65 per cent.

St. Louis, Iron Mountain and Southern, River and Gulf division, first 4s, due 1933; price, about 79; income yield, 5.75 per cent.

Indiana Steel Company first 5s, due 1952; price, about 99½; income yield, 5 per cent.

National Tube Company first 5s, due 1952; price, about 95½; income yield, 5.25 per cent.

The best plan for a woman who desires five per cent for her money with the highest degree of safety, or the minimum of risk, is to diversify her investment. A fund of three thousand dollars may be distributed among three different issues; or it is susceptible of still wider diversification if

bonds of a denomination of five hundred dollars, or one hundred dollars, be selected. In laying out a sum of money, either small or large, it is far better for a woman to distribute it and thus scatter the risk, than to confine it to a single security which returns a high yield.

In making an investment it is never wholly wise to be a stickler for some special rate of interest, for thereby one may overlook highly desirable securities which give a shade less income, and hit upon something which returns the desired yield at the

expense of quality and safety. In many cases a difference of one per cent per annum is all that intervenes on occasions between safety and risk. On an investment of three thousand dollars this difference amounts to thirty dollars a year, two dollars and fifty cents a month, less than ten cents a day.

While it is desirable to look after small sums carefully, it is scarcely worth while to put three thousand dollars to the hazard in order to gain such a trifling sum in additional income.

ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS.

TO OUR CORRESPONDENTS

We cannot undertake to answer inquiries by letter. We have hitherto endeavored to do so in all cases when a reply by mail was requested, but the task has become so heavy that we can continue it no longer. Questions about matters of sufficient general interest will be answered in this department with as little delay as possible. Letters of inquiry should be addressed to MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE (Financial Department), and as evidence of good faith correspondents must give their names and addresses.

STOCKS THAT PAY NO DIVIDENDS

In your opinion is the stock of the Corn Products Refining Company, which is now quoted on the New York Stock Exchange at about \$11 a share, a good purchase?
F. W. B., Fort Worth, Tex.

Can you furnish information regarding the Batopilas Mining Company, of Mexico? Did it ever pay dividends? I understand it is listed on the New York Stock Exchange.
A. W. G., Pittsburgh, Pa.

Can you give me some information in regard to the Brunswick Terminal and Railway Securities Company, and if the Panama Canal is likely to help it to any extent?
N. H., New York.

I notice that the stock of the Wabash Railroad is selling away below par. Would you consider it a good investment to buy it with the intention of holding it until it rises in value?
H. W., St. Louis, Mo.

The stocks mentioned by these correspondents are not dividend-payers, and the prices at which they are quoted on the New York Stock Exchange, where all four of them are listed, do not indicate any reasonable prospect of dividends. The Wabash Railroad is hopelessly bankrupt, and its stockholders are likely to incur a heavy assessment.

The purchase of a non-dividend-paying stock is, under any ordinary circumstances, a purely speculative operation. Those contemplating such a transaction, therefore, have no proper claim upon the attention of this department. As we have repeatedly stated, our purpose is to assist investors, not speculators.

The buyer of stock that pays no dividend must depend, for a return upon his money, on a rise in the selling price of his shares. Such a rise is a thing that we cannot undertake to predict. We do not care to make guesses as to the course of stock-market quotations. Any one who decides to gamble in this way must do so on his own responsibility. We can only assure him that the odds of the game are against him.

The number of inquiries that we receive about non-dividend-paying shares shows that they have a fascination for many people, even among those who would not class themselves as speculators. It may be due to the idea that such stocks must be at or near the bottom, where they cannot go down much, but may by some turn of fortune rise largely. More probably, however, it is to be ascribed to the wide-spread love of what is or seems to be cheap.

The desire to buy things at low cost is strong in human nature. In many instances it leads to waste rather than thrift; and especially is this the case in finance. It is a very serious mistake to confuse, as so many do, stocks quoted at a low price with stocks that really deserve to be called cheap.

TROUBLES OF A GREAT RAILROAD

Can you tell me what are the true facts underlying all this talk about the New Haven Railroad, and what is the actual condition of the company's affairs? I hold a few shares of its stock, which I bought about eight years ago, paying a little more than \$200 a share for it. To-day's newspaper reports it as selling on the New York Stock Exchange at 103 $\frac{3}{4}$, so that I have lost—on paper, at least—practically half of my investment. What is the matter?
B. F. C., Rochester, N. Y.

To tell what is the matter with the New York, New Haven and Hartford Railroad would be a long story. Without entering into the details of a complicated and controverted subject, however, it may be said briefly that the policy of the present management of the

New Haven system has apparently been to acquire a practical monopoly of transportation in New England. It has secured the ownership or control of steam railroads, electric lines, and steamship companies operating in that territory, paying high prices for properties which, in many cases, have proved unprofitable. As a result, the company's capitalization has increased much faster than its earning power. Its dividends have been reduced from eight to six per cent—being paid, as the critics of the management assert, with borrowed money rather than from earnings.

During the investigation of the matter by the Interstate Commerce Commission, Louis D. Brandeis phrased the accusation thus:

For five out of the last six years the New Haven has been paying in dividends more than it has earned. It has pursued a policy of concealing from the stockholders and from the public the character of its methods and policies.

The Boston and Maine, its most important subsidiary, has outstanding \$24,500,000 of short-term notes, which in natural course it will have to meet in the coming year; and yet it is about to pass its dividend, and it is doubtful whether it can meet its fixed charges.

The New Haven's affairs are managed in the same reckless fashion. It has notes to meet in the next eight months amounting to between forty and fifty million dollars. Such management would be condemned in a wildcat mining scheme.

It presents in perfectly definite form the results of unregulated and unbridled monopoly.

Although it is to be feared that these charges against the present management of the road are in the main true, and that the New Haven is at present in an unenviable financial situation, yet, nevertheless, there is another side to the picture. The railroad itself is a splendid property, owning very large assets and occupying a commanding position in a territory of stable civilization, great industrial advantages, and enormous wealth. The immediate prospect before the company's stockholders is gloomy enough, and particularly unpleasant for those who bought their shares at the high prices of former years; but there is little doubt that the sky will ultimately brighten.

The stock has had a tremendous fall, and very possibly it may drop to a still lower price in the near future; but we recommend our correspondent, and others who are in the same situation, not to sacrifice their shares.

GOLD AND DIAMONDS IN BRAZIL

Is the Gem Dredging Company, of South Dakota, likely to succeed in its project of extracting diamonds and gold from the rivers of Brazil? What can you tell me about the company, and would you recommend the shares, which have a par value of one dollar, and can be bought for less, as an investment? J. D., Elizabeth, N. J.

For aught I know, the Gem Dredging Company may some day succeed in scooping up tons of diamonds and gold from the Brazilian river-bottoms, but I think the chances of its doing so are decidedly remote.

The concern is fishing in very troubled waters at present—not in South America, but in New Jersey, where its officials have been made parties defendant in a number of lawsuits brought by disgruntled shareholders, who charge them with fraud and misrepresentation in selling stock.

This Gem Company was incorporated in 1909 and reorganized in 1911, with an authorized capitalization of \$1,500,000, of which \$500,000 is common stock and \$1,000,000 preferred. It is said that it succeeded in marketing about \$400,000 of its stock at a depreciated price. Of course, it issued a glowing prospectus, which is garnished with interesting illustrations. One of these shows the promoter of the enterprise, Harwood Fish, mayor of Roselle Park, New Jersey, astride a white mule, gazing at the company's property, which seems to consist largely of rivers.

The prospectus promised large returns to investors; but there are many things to militate against the success of the venture, if the allegations found in the morning papers are sustained. It is asserted, for instance, that the company does not own the valuable property it has claimed in Brazil, and that even such buildings and machinery as it does possess have been attached by its employees for unpaid salaries. Besides this, it is alleged that the company had no license from the Brazilian government. This is a rather important detail, if you are going to fish in the waters of a foreign country for tons of diamonds and gold.

As an investment, I think the shares of the Gem Dredging Company are comparable with a ticket in a lottery made up of one million chances and one capital prize. By its side, a bet on a horse-race, or the purchase of a stack of chips in a faro-bank, would be the acme of conservatism.

AS TO CHANGING INVESTMENTS

I have \$15,122 invested in various securities, notes, and a savings deposit, as follows:

Seven \$500 notes; one \$1,000 note; one \$3,500 note, secured by deeds of trust on District of Columbia improved real estate paying five and one-half per cent.

Two Chicago, Burlington and Quincy (Illinois Division) 4s of 1949, paying four per cent.

Two Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe 4s of 1995, paying four per cent.

Two Southern Pacific first refunding 4s of 1955, paying four per cent.

One note for \$322 secured by mortgage on Western farm land, paying eight per cent.

Savings-bank deposit, \$800, paying three per cent.

The total annual income from this money is \$729.76, and if a way exists by which the earning power of the capital may be safely increased, I should like to avail myself of it. Safety is the prime consideration.

C. H. B., Washington, D. C.

If our correspondent was making an entirely new investment at this time he could obtain a larger return from a fund of \$15,122

than \$720.76, which figures out a net yield of 4.83 per cent; but having laid out his money as he has, we doubt whether C. H. B. can improve his position materially.

Bearing in mind his desire for a high degree of safety, we do not see how he can expect much more than five and one-half per cent, which he is already receiving from his secured real-estate notes. To obtain a higher yield, it would be necessary to sell these notes. We know nothing of their marketability. Even if it is advisable for our correspondent to dispose of them, which we very much doubt, we do not know that he could do so without sacrifice.

He places a valuation of par upon all his railway bonds, which we assume was their cost. They are all quoted below that level now, and it would entail a considerable loss to sell them, in order to invest in bonds yielding a higher interest. We know nothing of this reader's circumstances, and we cannot assume the responsibility of advising him to take an actual loss by selling his securities in the hope of recovering it, and in addition obtaining a larger income from his money, by purchasing other securities which might yield more.

THE M. W. SAVAGE FACTORIES

Will you kindly advise me if the M. W. Savage Factories, Incorporated, of Minneapolis, a prospectus of which I enclose, is a good investment?

R. M. W., El Paso, Tex.

The prospectus, so-called, of the M. W. Savage Factories, Incorporated, is of circus-poster proportions, and similar in appearance and purport to the broadside employed by this promoter in exploiting his "Dan Patch" Electric Railroad a few years ago. It contains many extravagant promises of earnings and profits to come from the undertaking, which is described as "the people's profit-sharing mail-order company," but it presents no facts upon which one can base an intelligent opinion.

Among things lacking are the State of the company's incorporation, a list of officers and directors, the amount of authorized capital, the amount outstanding and for sale, and the proportions of common and preferred stock. Though it is said to be a going concern, selling stock and paying dividends at the same time, the broadside presents no balance-sheet, inventory, or income account. No intelligent person would purchase shares in a company without information of this character before him. Preferred shares, par value ten dollars, with a share of common stock chucked in, are offered for sale at par.

The prospectus contains the appeals to credulity usually found in such literature. Simple-minded souls are urged to buy shares in the M. W. Savage Factories, Incorporated,

because some one might have made money if he had bought stock in an air-brake company, or a gas company, or a linotype company, and the like. Of course, reference is made to the well-known one hundred dollars invested in Bell Telephone Company stock, which is now worth several thousand times as much. No prospectus would be complete without it, despite the action of President Vail, of the American Telephone and Telegraph Company, in branding the story as a lie made out of whole cloth.

I do not find that any of the geniuses who brought to pass these results, real or apocryphal, have attached themselves to the Savage enterprise, and so I fail to see where in the application lies. Nor does it follow, because there have been some conspicuously successful mail-order houses and five-and-ten-cent stores, that every Jack who goes into the business will be successful at it. As a special bait in this case, attention is directed to the fact that the stock of Sears, Roebuck & Co. has sold at 219. To correct the Savage figures, the high price was 221½. I find no mention, however, of the stock's subsequent break to 165, or 56½ points lower.

I do not regard the M. W. Savage Factories stock as a good investment, nor is it desirable for speculative purchases, for there is no general market in which it could be sold readily if the purchaser desired to realize upon his holdings.

"RIGHTS" TO NEW STOCK

How is the value of "rights" determined, when a company issues new stock? I am aware that the demand for the new shares affects the value of the rights, but I would like to know what principle or plan is followed in determining their approximate worth in the beginning.

C. M. T., Toronto.

When an established company authorizes an increase in its capital stock, it frequently offers the new shares on an attractive basis to its stockholders, in order to influence subscriptions. The privilege or "right" to subscribe to the new issues belongs only to a stockholder of record. It is his to do what he will with it. He may exercise his right—that is, he may subscribe to the new stock; or he may sell it to some one else, or he may let it lapse entirely.

As the subscription right is solely a privilege of a shareholder, the method pursued in computing its value proceeds along the line of a non-shareholder becoming a shareholder, in order to secure the benefit or advantage of subscribing for stock at a figure under the current market price.

To illustrate, let us assume that a corporation whose stock is selling at 150 offers its shareholders the privilege of subscribing for new stock at par to the extent of 25 per cent of their recorded holdings. One hundred

shares of outstanding stock, at 150, are worth \$15,000. The holder of that amount acquires the privilege of subscribing to twenty-five shares, at a cost of \$2,500. This would give him one hundred and twenty-five shares at an outlay of \$17,500.

The average price of these one hundred and twenty-five shares is \$140, and the difference between that figure and \$150, the current market price of the shares, or \$10, is the value of the "rights." Subscription privileges fluctuate in value as the price of the stock upon which their value is based fluctuates.

When the subscription privilege expires, the stock sells "ex-rights," and the market price of the rights is deducted from the quoted price of the shares. Thus, in the case used for an illustration, provided the quotation were unchanged, when the rights "came off," the stock selling one day at 150 would sell the next at 140.

UNPAID STATE DEBTS

I shall be extremely obliged to you if you could find space for discussing the uncanceled debt of some of the United States, and the unpaid interest thereon. In certain sections of the Montevideo press there have lately been some nasty references to the "Yankee" States who have a large external debt whereon no interest is being paid. This is a *coup de jeu* on the part of South American finance ministers who dislike to see that their respective countries—especially Uruguay—are considered insolvent in some financial circles of Europe and the States.

I should thank you if you would enlighten your readers on these points—which are the external debts of American States not paying interest or principal? What are the reasons for the non-payment?

J. R. O., Buenos Ayres.

It is impossible to deal fully with the question of repudiated or defaulted State debts within the necessary space-limits of this department. The subject has already been dealt with at some length in an article on "Repudiated State Bonds," published in MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE for November last, pages 362 to 364, and to this we must refer our correspondent from the Argentine metropolis. Apparently he wants us to supply him with facts that will enable him to confound the foreign critics who have called attention to the unpaid obligations of certain American States. We regret that we find it difficult to do so.

AS TO OIL PROMOTIONS

I enclose a circular just received. Will you kindly give your opinion regarding it? I take MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE regularly.

M. C. G., Milford, N. I.

The circular referred to is from the Oil Mountain Land Company, of Casper, Wyoming. It is scarcely necessary to add that it tells of a "wonderful opportunity" to secure wealth by putting a trifling sum of money into the "wonderful oil-fields" which the company controls.

Our correspondent may take MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE regularly, but he does not read

this department regularly, or he would know that we do not recommend oil promotions.

SURE WEALTH FROM PECANS

Enclosed please find copy of contract from the Dixie Pecan Orchards Company of Albany, Ga. Kindly let me know if you consider this a safe investment, and if the climate is healthful.

L. K. R., Chicago.

We have no specific information in regard to the concern mentioned, except what we gather from the company's literature, specimens of which have been sent us from time to time by various correspondents in Northern cities. It seems to be of the usual sort issued by companies who promise to enrich their clients through pecan orchards, orange groves, banana plantations, and the like. It contains much eloquence about the "call" of the "sunny South," and some attractive engravings of pecans and pecan-trees—grown on other people's property, not the company's.

One of the concern's booklets prints a detailed calculation figuring that an immediate "investment" of \$750 will ultimately produce an income of \$12,500 a year; and the same authority claims that the company's plan "eliminates absolutely every possibility of loss to the investor." This is certainly "going some."

We are not personally acquainted with the neighborhood of Albany, Georgia, but most of that State has a fine Southern climate and is healthful for residence. Before dealing with these philanthropic promoters, however, we recommend our correspondent to read an article entitled "Farming on Shares," which appeared in this department last September, on pages 992 to 994.

ANOTHER PUBLISHING CONCERN

Kindly give the standing of the Shaw Publishing Company, of St. Louis. They claim to be incorporated for one million dollars, par value of stock one dollar, thirteen thousand shares sold. They represent that they are a going concern, and that the purchase of their stock is a good investment.

L. B. O., Dwight, Ill.

We cannot give the standing of the Shaw Publishing Company, for we do not know the concern, and do not find any mention of it in our reference-books. This is not strange if, as our correspondent states, it has succeeded in selling only thirteen thousand of its one million one-dollar shares—not much more than one per cent of the total; for that means that the company is as yet in the early stages of raising its capital.

Before deciding to put his money into such a proposition, we urge our correspondent to read two brief articles on publishing promotions printed in this department in May and July of last year. We also advise him to consider whether he would be likely to find a market for the stock in case, having bought it, he should wish to sell it.

THE LITTLE NUGGET

A NOVEL—COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

BY P. G. WODEHOUSE

AUTHOR OF "THE INTRUSIONS OF JIMMY," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY WILLIAM B. KING

IF the managers of the Hotel Guelph, that London landmark, could have been present at three o'clock one afternoon in early January in the sitting-room of the suite which they had assigned to Mrs. Elmer Ford, late of New York, they might well have felt a little aggrieved.

Philosophers among them would possibly have meditated on the limitations of human effort. For they had done their best for Mrs. Ford. They had housed her well. They had fed her well. They had caused inspired servants to anticipate her every need. Yet here she was, in the midst of all these aids to a contented mind, exhibiting a restlessness and impatience of her surroundings that would have been noticeable in a caged tigress or a prisoner of the Bastille.

She paced the room. She sat down, picked up a novel, dropped it, and, rising, resumed her patrol. The clock striking, she compared it with her watch, which she had consulted two minutes before. She opened the locket that hung by a gold chain from her neck, looked at its contents, and sighed.

Finally, going quickly into the bedroom, she took from a suit-case a framed oil painting. Returning with this to the sitting-room, she placed it on a chair, and stepped back, gazing at it hungrily. Her brown eyes, normally hard and imperious, were softened. Her mouth quivered.

"Ogden!" she whispered.

The picture which had inspired this exhibition of feeling would probably not have affected the casual spectator to quite the

same degree. He would have seen merely a very faulty and amateurish portrait of a singularly repellent little boy of about eleven, who stared out from the canvas with an expression half stolid, half querulous. It was a bulgy, overfed little boy; a little boy who looked exactly what he was—the spoiled child of parents who had far more money than was good for them.

As Mrs. Ford gazed at the picture, and the picture stared back at her, the telephone-bell rang. She ran to it eagerly. It was the office of the hotel, announcing a caller.

"Yes? Yes? Who?" Her voice fell, as if the name was not the one she had expected. "Oh, yes," she said. "Yes, ask Lord Mountry to come to me here, please."

She returned to the portrait. The look of impatience, which had left her face as the bell sounded, had returned. She suppressed it with an effort as her visitor entered.

Lord Mountry was a blond, pink-faced, fair-mustached young man of about twenty-eight; a thick-set, solemn young man. He winced as he caught sight of the picture, which fixed him with a stony eye immediately on his entry, and quickly looked away from it.

"I say, it's all right, Mrs. Ford." He was of the type which wastes no time on preliminary greetings. "I've got him."

"Got him!"

Mrs. Ford's voice was startled.

"Stanborough, you know."

"Oh! I—I was thinking of something else. Won't you sit down?"

Lord Mountry sat down.

"The artist, you know. You remember you said at lunch the other day you wanted your little boy's portrait painted, as you only had one of him at eleven—"

"This is Ogden, Lord Mountry. I painted this myself."

His lordship had selected a chair that enabled him to present a shoulder to the painting, and was wearing a slightly dogged look suggestive of one who "turns no more his head, because he knows a frightful fiend doth close behind him tread." He forced himself round, and met the portrait's gaze with as much nonchalance as he could summon up.

"Er—yes," he said. He paused. "Fine, manly little fellow. What?" he continued.

"Yes, isn't he?"

His lordship stealthily resumed his former position.

"I recommended this fellow Stanborough, if you remember. He's a great pal of mine, and I'd like to give him a leg-up if I could. They tell me he's a topping artist. Don't know much about it myself. You told me to bring him round here this afternoon, you remember, to talk things over. He's waiting down-stairs."

"Oh, yes, yes. Of course, I've not forgotten. Thank you so much, Lord Mountry."

"Rather a good scheme occurred to me—that is, if you haven't thought over the idea of that trip on my yacht and decided it would bore you to death. You still feel like making one of the party. What?"

Mrs. Ford shot a swift glance at the clock.

"I'm looking forward to it," she said.

"Well, then, why shouldn't we kill two birds with one stone—combine the voyage and the portrait, don't you know? You could bring your little boy along—he'd love the trip—and I'd bring Stanborough. What?"

This offer was not the outcome of a sudden spasm of warm-heartedness on his lordship's part. He had pondered the matter deeply, and had come to the conclusion that, though it had flaws, it was the best plan.

He was alive to the fact that a small boy was not an absolute essential to the success of the yachting trip, and, since seeing Ogden Ford's portrait, he had realized still more clearly that the scheme had drawbacks. But he badly wanted Stanborough

to make one of the party. Whatever Ogden might be, there was no doubt that Billy Stanborough, that fellow of infinite jest, was the ideal companion for a voyage. It would make all the difference, having him.

The trouble was that Stanborough flatly refused to take an indefinite holiday, on the plea that he could not afford the time. Upon which his lordship, seldom blessed with great ideas, had surprised himself by producing the scheme he had just sketched out to Mrs. Ford.

He looked at her expectantly as he finished speaking, and was surprised to see a swift cloud of distress pass over her face. He rapidly reviewed his last speech. No, nothing to upset any one in that. He was puzzled.

She looked past him at the portrait. There was pain in her eyes.

"I'm afraid you don't quite understand the position of affairs," she said. Her voice was harsh and strained.

"Eh?"

"You see, I have not—" She stopped. "My little boy is not—Ogden is not living with me just now."

"At school, eh?"

"No, not at school. Let me tell you the whole position. Mr. Ford and I did not get on very well together, and a year ago we were divorced in Washington, on the ground of incompatibility, and—and—"

She choked. His lordship, a young man with a shrinking horror of the deeper emotions, whether exhibited in woman or man, writhed silently. That was the worst of these Americans! Always getting divorced and causing unpleasantness! How was a fellow to know? Why hadn't the person who first introduced them—Mountry couldn't remember just who it was—told him about this? He had supposed she was just the ordinary American woman doing Europe, with an affectionate, dollar-dispensing husband in the background somewhere.

"Er—" he said. It was all he could find to say.

"And—and the court," said Mrs. Ford, between her teeth, "gave him the custody of Ogden."

Lord Mountry, pink with embarrassment, gurgled sympathetically.

"Since then I have not seen Ogden. That was why I was interested when you mentioned your friend Mr. Stanborough. It struck me that Mr. Ford could hardly

object to my having a portrait of my son painted at my own expense. Nor do I suppose that he will, when—if the matter is put to him. But, well, you see it would be premature to make any arrangements at present for having the picture painted on our yacht trip."

"I'm afraid it knocks that scheme on the head," said Lord Mountry mournfully.

"Not necessarily."

"Eh?"

"I don't want to make plans yet, but—it is possible that Ogden may be with us after all. Something may be—arranged."

"You think you may be able to bring him along on the yacht after all?"

"I am hoping so."

Lord Mountry, however willing to emit sympathetic gurgles, was too plain and straightforward a young man to approve of wilful blindness to obvious facts.

"I don't see how you are going to override the decision of the court. It holds good in England, I suppose?"

"I am hoping something may be—arranged."

"Oh, same here, same here. Certainly!" Having done his duty by not allowing plain facts to be ignored, his lordship was ready to become sympathetic again. "By the way, where is Ogden?"

"He is down at Mr. Ford's house in the country. But—"

She was interrupted by the ringing of the telephone-bell. She was out of her seat and across the room at the receiver with what appeared to Lord Mountry's startled gaze one bound. As she put the instrument to her ear a wave of joy swept over her face. She gave a little cry of delight and excitement.

"Send them right up at once," she said, and turned to her visitor, transformed. "Lord Mountry," she added quickly, "please don't think me impossibly rude if I turn you out. Some—some people are coming to see me. I must—"

His lordship rose hurriedly.

"Of course. Of course. Certainly! Where did I put my—ah, here!"

He seized his hat, and by way of economizing effort knocked his stick to the floor with the same movement. Mrs. Ford watched his bendings and gropings with growing impatience, till finally he rose, a little flushed, but with a full hand—stick, gloves, and hat, all present and correct.

"Good-by, then, Mrs. Ford, for the

present. You'll let me know if your little boy will be able to make one of our party on the yacht?"

"Yes, yes. Thank you ever so much. Good-by!"

"Good-by." He reached the door and opened it. "By Jove," he said, springing round, "Stanborough! What about Stanborough? Shall I tell him to wait? He's down below, you know!"

"Yes, yes. Tell Mr. Stanborough I'm dreadfully sorry to have to keep him waiting, and ask him if he won't stay for a few minutes in the palm-room."

Inspiration came to Lord Mountry.

"I'll give him a drink," he said.

"Yes, yes, anything! Lord Mountry, you really must go. I know I'm rude. I don't know what I'm saying. But—my boy is returning to me!"

The accumulated chivalry of generations of chivalrous ancestors acted like a spur on his lordship. He understood but dimly, yet well enough to enable him to realize that a scene was about to take place in which he was most emphatically not "on." A mother's meeting with her long-lost child—this is a sacred thing.

Turning like a flash, he bounded through the doorway, and, as somebody happened to be coming in at the same time, there was a collision, which left him breathing apologies in his familiar attitude of stooping to pick up his hat.

One of the newcomers was a tall, strikingly handsome girl, with a rather hard and cynical cast of countenance. She was leading by the hand a small, fat boy of about fourteen years of age, whose likeness to the portrait on the chair proclaimed his identity. He had escaped the collision, but seemed offended by it; for, eying the bending peer with cold distaste, he summed up his opinion of him in the one word:

"Chump!"

Lord Mountry rose.

"I beg your pardon," he said for perhaps the seventh time.

The peer was thoroughly unstrung. Always excessively shy, he was embarrassed by quite a variety of causes. The world was full of eyes—Mrs. Ford's, saying "Go!" Ogden's, saying "Fool!" the portrait, saying "Idiot!" and, finally, the eyes of this wonderfully handsome girl, large, gray, cool, amused, and contemptuous, saying—so it seemed to Mountry in that feverish moment—"Who is this curi-

ous pink person who cumpers the ground before me?"

"I—I beg your pardon," he repeated.

"Ought to look where you're going," said Ogden severely.

"Not at all," said the girl. "Won't you introduce me, Nesta?"

"Lord Mountry—Miss Drassilis," said Mrs. Ford.

"I'm afraid we're driving Lord Mountry away," said the girl.

Her eyes seemed to his lordship larger, grayer, cooler, more amused, and more contemptuous than ever. He floundered in them like an unskilful swimmer.

"No, no," he stammered. "Give you my word. Just going. Good-by! You won't forget to let me know about the yacht, Mrs. Ford. What? It'll be an awfully jolly party. Good-by, good-by, Miss Drassilis."

He looked at Ogden for an instant, as if undecided whether to take the liberty of addressing him, too, and then, his heart apparently failing him, turned and bolted. From down the corridor came the clatter of a dropped stick.

Cynthia Drassilis closed the door, and smiled.

"A nervous young person!" she said. "What was he saying about a yacht, Nesta?"

Mrs. Ford roused herself from her fascinated contemplation of Ogden.

"Oh, nothing. Some of us are going to the south of France in his yacht next week."

"What a delightful idea!" There was a certain pensive note in Cynthia's voice. "A splendid idea," she murmured.

Mrs. Ford swooped. She descended on Ogden in a swirl and rustle of expensive millinery, and clasped him to her.

"My boy!"

It is not given to everybody to glide neatly into a scene of tense emotion. Ogden failed to do so. He wriggled roughly from the embrace.

"Got a cigarette?" he said.

He was an extraordinarily unpleasant little boy. Physically, the portrait standing on the chair did him more than justice. Painted by a mother's loving hand, it flattered him. It was bulgy; he was more bulgy. It was sullen; he scowled. And, art having its limitations, particularly amateur art, the portrait gave no hint of his very repellent manner.

He was an intensely sophisticated child. He had the air of one who has seen all that life has to offer, and has become permanently bored. His speech and bearing were those of a young man, and a distinctly unlovable young man.

Even Mrs. Ford was momentarily chilled. She laughed shakily.

"How very matter-of-fact you are, darling!" she said.

Cynthia was regarding the heir to the Ford millions with her usual steady, half-contemptuous gaze.

"He has been that all day," she said. "You have no notion what a help it was to me."

Mrs. Ford turned to her effusively.

"Oh, Cynthia dear, I haven't thanked you!"

"No," interpolated the girl dryly.

"You're a wonder, darling—you really are! I've been repeating that ever since I got your telegram from Franleigh." She broke off. "Ogden, come near me, my little son!"

He lurched toward her sullenly.

"Don't muss a fellow now," he stipulated, before allowing himself to be enfolded in the outstretched arms.

"Tell me, Cynthia," resumed Mrs. Ford, "how did you do it? I was telling Lord Mountry that I *hoped* I might see my Ogden again soon, but I never really hoped. It seemed too impossible that you should succeed!"

"This Lord Mountry of yours," said Cynthia. "How did you get to know him? Why have I not seen him before?"

"I met him in Paris in the fall. He has been out of London for a long time, looking after his father, who was ill."

"I see!"

"He has been most kind, making arrangements about getting Ogden's portrait painted. But bother Lord Mountry! How did we get side-tracked onto him? Tell me how you got Ogden away."

Cynthia yawned.

"It was extraordinarily easy, as it turned out, you see."

"Ogden, darling," observed Mrs. Ford, "don't go away. I want you *near* me."

"Oh, all right!"

"Then stay by me, angel-face."

"Oh, slush!" muttered angel-face beneath his breath. "Say, I'm blamed hungry," he added.

It was as if an electric shock had been

applied to Mrs. Ford. She sprang to her feet.

"My poor child! Of course you must have some lunch. Ring the bell, Cynthia. I'll have them send up some here."

"I'll have mine here, if I may," said Cynthia.

"Oh, you've had no lunch either! I was forgetting that."

"I thought you were."

"You must both lunch here."

"Really," said Cynthia, "I think it would be better if Ogden had his downstairs in the restaurant."

"Want to talk scandal, eh?" suggested the youth.

"Ogden, *dearest!*" said Mrs. Ford. "Very well, Cynthia. Go, Ogden. You will order yourself something substantial, marvel-child?"

"Bet your life!" said the son and heir tersely.

There was a brief silence as the door closed. Cynthia gazed at her friend with a peculiar expression.

"Well, I did it, dear," she said.

"Yes. It's splendid. You're a wonder, darling!"

"Yes," said Cynthia.

There was another silence.

"By the way," said Mrs. Ford, "didn't you say there was a little thing, a small bill, that was worrying you?"

"Did I mention it? Yes, there is. It's rather pressing. In fact, it's taking up most of the horizon at present. Here it is."

"Is it a large sum?"

Mrs. Ford took the slip of paper and gave a slight gasp. Then, coming to the bureau, she took out her check-book.

"It's very kind of you, Nesta," said Cynthia. "They were beginning to show quite a vindictive spirit about it."

She folded the check calmly and put it in her purse.

"And now tell me how you did it," said Mrs. Ford. She dropped into a chair and leaned back, her hands behind her head. For the first time she seemed to enjoy perfect peace of mind. Her eyes half closed, as if she had been making ready to listen to some favorite music. "Tell me from the very beginning," she said softly.

Cynthia checked a yawn.

"Very well, dear," she said. "I caught the ten twenty to Eastnor, which isn't a bad train, if you ever want to go down there. I arrived at a quarter past twelve, and went

straight up to the house—you've never seen the house, of course? It's quite charming—and told the butler that I wanted to see Mr. Ford on business. I had taken the precaution to find out that he was not there. He is at Droitwich."

"Rheumatism," murmured Mrs. Ford. "He has it sometimes."

"The man told me he was away, and then he seemed to think that I ought to go. I stuck like a limpet. I sent him to fetch Ogden's tutor. The tutor's name is Broster, Reggie Broster. He is a very nice young man—big, broad shoulders and such a kind face."

"Yes, dear, yes?"

"I told him I was doing a series of drawings for a magazine of the interiors of well-known country houses."

"He believed you?"

"He believes everything. He's that kind of man. He believed me when I told him that my editor particularly wanted me to sketch the staircase. They had told me about the staircase at the inn. I forget what it is exactly, but it's something rather special in staircases."

"So you got in?"

"So I got in."

"And saw Ogden?"

"Only for a moment. Then Reggie—" "Who?"

"Mr. Broster. I always think of him as Reggie. He's one of nature's Reggies. Such a kind, honest face! Well, as I was saying, Reggie discovered that it was time for lessons, and sent Ogden up-stairs."

"By himself?"

"By himself! Reggie and I chatted for a while."

Mrs. Ford's eyes opened, brown and bright and hard.

"Mr. Broster is not a proper tutor for my boy," she said coldly.

"I suppose it was wrong of Reggie," said Cynthia. "But—I was wearing this hat."

"Go on!"

"Well, after a time I said I must be starting my work. He wanted me to start with the room we were in. I said no; I was going out into the grounds to sketch the house from the east. I chose the east because it happens to be nearest the railway-station. I added that I supposed he sometimes took Ogden for a little walk in the grounds. He said yes, he did, and it was just about due. He said possibly he

might come round my way. He said Ogden would be interested in my sketch. He seemed to think a lot of Ogden's fondness for art."

"Mr. Broster is *not* a proper tutor for my boy!"

"Well, he isn't your boy's tutor now, is he, dear?"

"What happened then?"

"I strolled off with my sketching things. After a while Reggie and Ogden came up. I said I hadn't been able to work, because I had been frightened by a bull."

"Did he believe *that*?"

"*Certainly* he believed it. He was most kind and sympathetic. We had a nice chat. He told me all about himself. He used to be very good at football. He doesn't play now, but he often thinks of the past."

"But he must have seen that you couldn't sketch. Then what became of your magazine commission story?"

"Well, somehow the sketch seemed to get shelved. I didn't even have to start it. We were having our chat, you see. Reggie was telling me how good he had been at football when he was at Oxford, and he wanted me to see a newspaper clipping of a varsity match he had played in. I said I'd love to see it. He said it was in his suit-case in the house; so I promised to look after Ogden while he fetched it. I sent him off to get it just in time for us to catch the train. Off he went, and here we are. And now won't you order that lunch you mentioned? I'm starving."

Mrs. Ford rose. Half-way to the telephone she stopped suddenly.

"My dear child! It has only just struck me! We must leave here at once. He will have followed you. He will guess that Ogden has been kidnapped."

Cynthia smiled.

"Believe me, it takes Reggie quite a long time to guess anything. Besides, there are no trains for hours. We are quite safe."

"Are you sure?"

"Absolutely. I made certain of that before I left."

Mrs. Ford kissed her impulsively.

"Oh, Cynthia, you really are wonderful!"

She started back with a cry as the bell rang sharply.

"For goodness' sake, Nesta!" said Cynthia with irritation. "Do keep control of yourself. There's nothing to be fright-

ened about. I tell you Mr. Broster can't possibly have got here in the time, even if he knew where to go to, which I don't see how he could. It's probably Ogden."

The color came back into Mrs. Ford's cheeks.

"Why, of course!"

Cynthia opened the door.

"Come in, darling," said Mrs. Ford fondly.

A wiry little man with gray hair and spectacles entered.

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Ford," he said. "I have come to take Ogden back."

II

THERE are some situations in life so unexpected, so trying, that so far as concerns our opinion of those subjected to them we agree, as it were, not to count them. We refuse to allow the victim's behavior in circumstances so exacting to weigh with us in our estimate of his or her character.

We permit the great general, confronted suddenly with a mad bull, to turn and run, without forfeiting his reputation for courage. The bishop who, stepping on a concealed slide in winter, entertains passers-by with momentary rag-time steps, loses none of his dignity, once the performance is concluded.

In the same way, we must condone the behavior of Cynthia Drassilis on opening the door of Mrs. Ford's sitting-room and admitting, not Ogden, but this total stranger, who accompanied his entry with the remarkable speech recorded at the close of the previous chapter.

She was a girl who prided herself on her carefully *blasé* and supercilious attitude toward life; but this changeling was too much for her. She released the handle, tottered back, and, having uttered a discordant squeak of amazement, stood staring, eyes and mouth wide open.

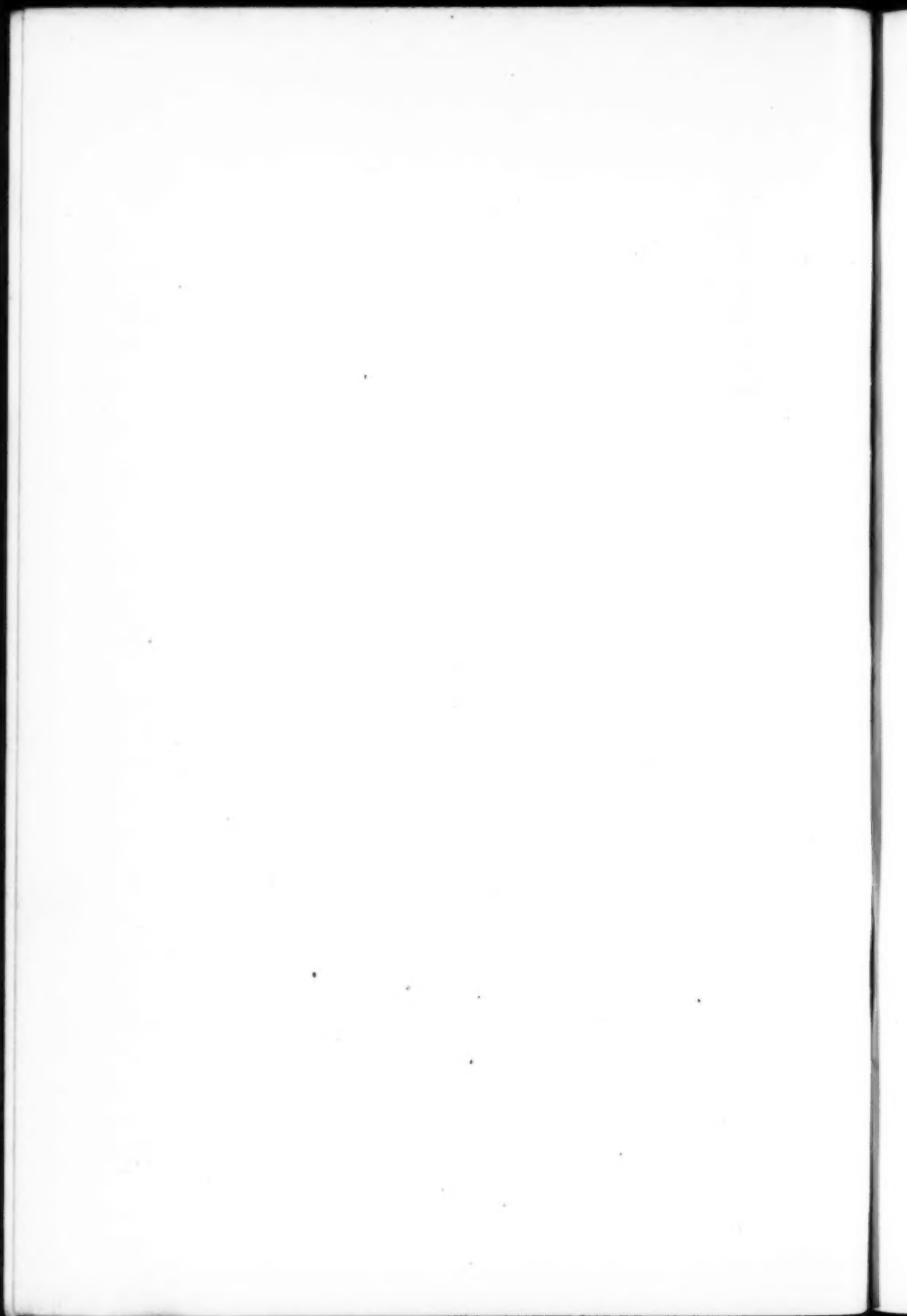
On Mrs. Ford the apparition had a different effect. The rather foolish smile of welcome vanished from her face, as if wiped away with a sponge. Her eyes, fixed and frightened like those of a trapped animal, glared at the intruder. She took a step forward, choking.

"What—what do you mean by daring to enter my room?" she cried.

The man held his ground, unmoved. His bearing was a curious blend of diffidence and aggressiveness. He was determined, but apologetic. A hired assassin



MRS. FORD GAZED AT THE PICTURE, AND THE PICTURE STARED BACK AT HER



of the Middle Ages, resolved to do his job loyally, yet conscious of causing inconvenience to his victim, might have had the same look.

"I am sorry," he said, "but I must ask you to let me have the boy, Mrs. Ford."

Cynthia was herself again now. She raked the intruder with the cool stare which had so disconcerted Lord Mountry.

"Who is this gentleman?" she asked languidly.

The intruder was made of tougher stuff than his lordship. He met her eye with quiet firmness.

"My name is Mennick," he said. "I am Mr. Elmer Ford's private secretary."

"What do you want?" said Mrs. Ford.

"I have already explained what I want, Mrs. Ford. I want Ogden."

Cynthia raised her eyebrows.

"What does he mean, Nesta? Ogden is not here."

Mr. Mennick produced from his breast-pocket a telegraph-form, and in his quiet, businesslike way proceeded to straighten it out.

"I have here," he said, "a telegram from Mr. Broster, Ogden's tutor. It was one of the conditions of his engagement that, if ever he was not certain of Ogden's whereabouts, he should let me know at once. He tells me that early this afternoon he left Ogden in the company of a strange young lady"—Mr. Mennick's spectacles flashed for a moment at Cynthia—"and that, when he returned, both of them had disappeared. He made inquiries, and discovered that this young lady caught the one fifteen express to London, Ogden with her. On receipt of this information I at once wired to Mr. Ford for instructions. I have his reply"—he fished for and produced a second telegram—"here."

"I still fail to see what brings you here," said Mrs. Ford. "Owing to the gross carelessness of his father's employees, my son appears to have been kidnaped. That is no reason—"

"I will read Mr. Ford's telegram," proceeded Mr. Mennick, unmoved. "It is rather long. I think Mr. Ford is somewhat annoyed. 'The boy has obviously been stolen by some hireling of his mother's.' I am reading Mr. Ford's actual words," he said, addressing Cynthia with that touch of diffidence which had marked his manner since his entrance.

"Don't apologize," said Cynthia with a

short laugh. "You're not responsible for Mr. Ford's rudeness."

Mr. Mennick bowed.

"He continues: 'Remove him from her illegal restraint. If necessary, call in police and employ force.'"

"Charming!" said Mrs. Ford.

"Practical," said Mr. Mennick. "There is more. 'Before doing anything else, sack that fool of a tutor, then go to agency and have them recommend good private school for boy. On no account engage another tutor. They make me tired. Fix all this to-day. Send Ogden back to Eastnor with Mrs. Sheridan. She will stay there with him till further notice.' That is Mr. Ford's message."

Mr. Mennick folded both documents carefully, and replaced them in his pocket. Mrs. Ford looked at the clock.

"And now would you mind going, Mr. Mennick?" she said.

"I am sorry to appear discourteous, Mrs. Ford, but I cannot go without Ogden."

"I shall telephone to the office to send up a porter to remove you."

"I shall take advantage of his presence to ask him to fetch a policeman."

In the excitement of combat, the veneer of apologetic diffidence was beginning to wear off Mr. Mennick. He spoke irritably. Cynthia appealed to his reason with the air of a bored princess descending to argument with a groom.

"Can't you see for yourself that he's not here?" she said. "Do you think we are hiding him?"

"Perhaps you would like to search my bedroom?" said Mrs. Ford, flinging the door open.

Mr. Mennick remained uncrushed.

"Quite unnecessary, Mrs. Ford. I take it, from the fact that he does not appear to be in this suite, that he is down-stairs making a late luncheon in the restaurant."

"I shall telephone—"

"And tell them to send him up. Believe me, Mrs. Ford, it is the only thing to do. You have my deepest sympathy, but I am employed by Mr. Ford and must act solely in his interests. The law is on my side. I am here to fetch Ogden away, and I am going to have him."

"You sha'n't!"

"I may add that when I came up here I left Mrs. Sheridan—she is a fellow secretary of mine; and you may remember Mr. Ford mentioning her in his telegram—I left

her to search the restaurant and grill-room, with instructions to bring Ogden, if found, to me in this room."

The door-bell rang. He went to the door and opened it.

"Come in, Mrs. Sheridan. Ah!"

A woman in a plain, neat blue dress entered the room. She was a small, graceful girl of about twenty-five, pretty and brisk, with the air of one accustomed to look after herself in a difficult world. Her eyes were clear and steady, her mouth sensitive but firm, her chin the chin of one who has met trouble and faced it bravely. In a word, she was a little soldier.

She was shepherding Ogden before her, a gorged but still sullen Ogden. He sighted Mr. Mennick, and stopped.

"Hello!" he said. "What have you blown in for?"

"He was just in the middle of his lunch," said the girl. "I thought you wouldn't mind if I let him finish."

"Say, what's it all about, anyway?" demanded Ogden crossly. "Can't a fellow have a bit of grub in peace? You give me a pain."

Mr. Mennick explained.

"Your father wishes you to return to Franleigh, Ogden."

"Oh, all right! I guess I'd better go, then. Good-by, ma."

Mrs. Ford choked.

"Kiss me, Ogden!"

Ogden submitted to the embrace in sulkily silence. The others comported themselves each after his or her own fashion. Mr. Mennick fingered his chin uncomfortably. Cynthia turned to the table and picked up an illustrated paper. Mrs. Sheridan's eyes filled with tears. She took a half step toward Mrs. Ford, as if about to speak, then drew back.

"Come, Ogden," said Mr. Mennick gruffly.

Necessary, this hired assassin work, but painful, very painful. He breathed a sigh of relief as he passed into the corridor with his prize.

At the door Mrs. Sheridan hesitated, stopped, and turned.

"I'm sorry," she said impulsively.

Mrs. Ford turned away without speaking, and went into the bedroom. Miss Drassilis laid down her paper.

"One moment, Mrs. Sheridan," Cynthia said. The girl had turned to go. She stopped. "Can you give me a minute?

Come in and shut the door. Won't you sit down? Very well. You seemed sorry for Mrs. Ford just now."

"I am very sorry for Mrs. Ford—very sorry. I hate to see her suffering. I wish Mr. Mennick had not brought me into this!"

"Nesta's mad about that boy," said Cynthia. "Heaven knows why, for I never saw such a repulsive child in my life. However, there it is. I am sorry for you. I gathered from what Mr. Mennick said that you were to have a good deal of Ogden's society for some time to come. How do you feel about it?"

Mrs. Sheridan moved toward the door.

"I must be going," she said. "Mr. Mennick will be waiting for me."

"One moment. Tell me, don't you think, after what you saw just now, that Mrs. Ford is the proper person to have charge of Ogden? You see how devoted she is to him?"

"May I be quite frank with you?"

"Please."

"Well, then, I think that Mrs. Ford's influence is the worst possible for Ogden. I am sorry for her, but that does not alter my opinion. It is entirely owing to Mrs. Ford that Ogden is what he is. She spoiled him, indulged him in every way, never checked him, till he has become—well, what you yourself called him—repulsive."

Cynthia laughed.

"Oh, well," she said, "I only talked that mother's love stuff because you looked the sort of girl who would like it. We can drop all that now and come down to business."

"I don't understand you."

"You will. I don't know if you think that I kidnaped Ogden from sheer affection for Mrs. Ford. I like Nesta, but not as much as that. No, I'm one of the *Get-Rich-Quick Wallingfords*, and I'm looking out for myself all the time. There's no one else to do it for me. I've a beastly home. My father's dead. My mother's a cat. So—"

"Please stop," said Mrs. Sheridan. "I don't know why you are telling me this."

"Yes, you do. I don't know what salary Mr. Ford pays you, but I don't suppose it's anything princely. Why don't you come over to us? Mrs. Ford would give you the earth if you smuggled Ogden back to her."

"You seem to be trying to bribe me," said Mrs. Sheridan.

"In this case," said Cynthia, "appearances aren't deceptive. I am."

"Good afternoon!"

"Don't be a little fool!"

The door slammed.

"Come back!" cried Cynthia.

She took a step as if to follow, but gave up the idea with a laugh. She sat down and began to read her illustrated paper again.

Presently the bedroom door opened. Mrs. Ford came in. She touched her eyes with a handkerchief as she entered. Cynthia looked up.

"I'm very sorry, Nesta," she said.

Mrs. Ford went to the window and looked out.

"I'm not going to break down, if that's what you mean," she said. "I don't care! And, anyhow, it shows that it *can* be done."

Cynthia turned a page of her paper.

"I've just been trying my hand at bribery and corruption."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, I promised and vowed many things in your name to that secretary person—the female one, not Mennick—if she would help us. Nothing doing! I told her to let us have Ogden as soon as possible, C. O. D., but she withered me with a glance and went."

Mrs. Ford shrugged her shoulders impatiently.

"Oh, let her go! I'm sick of amateurs."

"Thank you, dear," said Cynthia.

"Oh, I know you did your best. For an amateur you did wonderfully well; but amateurs never really succeed. There were a dozen little easy precautions which we neglected to take. What we want is a professional—a man whose business is kidnaping, the sort of man who kidnaps as a matter of course; some one like Smooth Sam Fisher."

"My dear Nesta! I don't think I know the gentleman."

"He tried to kidnap Ogden in 1906, when we were in New York. At least, the police put it down to him, though they could prove nothing. Then there was a horrible man, the police said he was called Buck MacGinnis. He tried in 1907. That was in Chicago."

"Good gracious! Kidnaping Ogden seems to be as popular as football. And I thought I was a pioneer!"

Something approaching pride came into Mrs. Ford's voice.

"I don't suppose there was a child in America," she said, "who had to be so carefully guarded. Why, the kidnapers had a special name for him. They called him the Little Nugget. For years we never allowed him out of our sight without a detective to watch him."

"Well, Mr. Ford seems to have changed all that now. I saw no detectives. I suppose he thinks they aren't necessary in England. Or perhaps he relied on Mr. Broster. Poor Reggie!"

"It was criminally careless; but this will be a lesson to him. He will be more careful in future how he leaves Ogden at the mercy of anybody who cares to come along and snap him up."

"Which, incidentally, does not make your chance of getting him away any lighter."

"Oh, I've given up hope now," said Mrs. Ford resignedly.

"I haven't," said Cynthia.

There was something in her voice which made her companion turn sharply and look at her. Mrs. Ford might affect to be resigned, but she was a woman of determination, and if the recent reverse had left her bruised, it had by no means crushed her.

"Cynthia! What do you mean? What are you hinting?"

"You despise amateurs, Nesta, but it seems that your professionals who kidnap as a matter of course and all the rest of it haven't been a bit more successful. It was not my want of experience that made me fail. It was my sex. This is man's work. If I had been a man, I should at least have had brute force to fall back upon when Mr. Mennick arrived."

Mrs. Ford nodded.

"Yes, but—"

"And," continued Cynthia, "as all these Smooth Sam Fishers of yours have failed, too, it is obvious that the only way to kidnap Ogden is from within. We must have some man working for us in the enemy's camp."

"Which is impossible," said Mrs. Ford dejectedly.

"Not at all!"

"You know a man?"

"I know *the* man."

"Cynthia! What do you mean? Who is he?"

"His name is Peter Burns."

Mrs. Ford shook her head.

"I don't know him."

"I'll introduce you. You'll like him."

"But, Cynthia, how do you know he would be willing to help us?"

"He would do it for me." Cynthia paused. "You see," she went on, "we are engaged to be married."

"My dear Cynthia! Why did you not tell me? When did it happen?"

"Last night, at the Fletchers' dance."

Mrs. Ford's eyes opened.

"Last night! Were you at a dance last night? And two railway journeys to-day! You must be tired to death."

"Oh, I'm all right, thanks. I suppose I shall be a wreck and not fit to be seen to-morrow, but just at present I feel as if nothing could tire me. It's the effect of being engaged, perhaps."

"Tell me about him."

"Well, he's rich and good-looking and amiable"—Cynthia ticked off these qualities on her fingers—"and I think he's brave, and he's certainly not so stupid as Mr. Broster."

"And you're very much in love with him?"

"I like him. There's no harm in Peter."

"You certainly aren't wildly enthusiastic!"

"Oh, we shall hit it off quite well together. I needn't pose to you, Nesta, thank goodness! That's one reason why I'm fond of you. You know how I am situated. I've got to marry some one rich, and Peter's quite the nicest rich man I've ever met. He's really wonderfully unselfish. I can't understand it, for with all his money you would expect him to be a perfect horror."

A thought seemed to strike Mrs. Ford.

"But, if he's so rich—" she began, but broke off with: "I forgot what I was going to say."

"Dear Nesta, I know what you were going to say. If he's so rich, why should he be marrying me, when he could take his pick of half London? Well, I'll tell you. He's marrying me, for one reason, because he's sorry for me; for another, because I had the sense to make him. He didn't think he was going to marry any one. A few years ago he had a disappointment. A girl jilted him. She must have been a fool. He thought he was going to live the rest of his life alone with his broken heart. I didn't mean to allow that. It's taken a long time—more than two years, from start

to finish—but I've done it. He's a sentimentalist. I worked on his sympathy, and last night I made him propose to me at the Fletchers' dance."

Mrs. Ford had not listened to these confidences unmoved. Several times she had tried to interrupt, but had been brushed aside. Now she spoke, sharply.

"You know I was not going to say anything of the kind! And I don't think you should speak in this horrible, cynical way of—of—"

She stopped, flushing. There were moments when she hated Cynthia. These occurred for the most part when the latter, as now, stirred her to an exhibition of honest feeling, which she looked on as rather unbecoming. Mrs. Ford had spent twenty years trying to forget that her husband had married her from behind the counter of a general store in an Illinois village, and these lapses into the uncultivated genuineness of her girlhood made her uncomfortable.

"I wasn't going to say anything of the kind," she repeated.

Cynthia was all smiling good humor.

"I know. I was only teasing you—'stringing,' they call it in your country, don't they?"

Mrs. Ford was mollified.

"I'm sorry, Cynthia. I didn't mean to snap at you. All the same—" she hesitated. What she wanted to ask smacked so dreadfully of Mechanicsville, Illinois. Yet she put the question bravely, for she was somehow feeling quite troubled about this unknown Mr. Burns. "Aren't you really fond of him at all, Cynthia?"

Cynthia beamed.

"Of course I am! He's a dear. Nothing would make me give him up. I'm devoted to old Peter. I only told you all that about him because it shows you how kind-hearted he is. He'll do anything for me. Well, shall I sound him about Ogden?"

The magic word took Mrs. Ford's mind off the matrimonial future of Mr. Burns and brought him into prominence in his capacity of knight errant. She laughed happily. The sting of defeat was already healing. The affair of Mr. Mennick began to appear in the light of a mere skirmish.

"You take my breath away!" she said "How do you propose that Mr. Burns shall help us?"

"It's perfectly simple. You heard Mr.

Mennick read that telegram. Ogden is to be sent to a private school. Peter shall go there, too."

"But how? I don't understand. We don't know which school Mr. Mennick will choose."

"We can very soon find out."

"But how can Mr. Burns go there?"

"Nothing easier. He will be a young man who has been left a little money and wants to start a school of his own. He goes to Ogden's man and suggests that he should pay a small premium to come for a term as an extra assistant master in order to learn the business. Mr. Man will jump at him. He will be getting the bargain of his life. Peter didn't get much of a degree at Oxford, but I believe he was wonderful at games. From a private-school point of view he's a treasure."

"But would he do it?"

"I think I can persuade him."

Mrs. Ford kissed her with an enthusiasm which hitherto she had reserved for Ogden.

"My darling girl," she cried, "if you knew how happy you have made me!"

"I do," said Cynthia definitely. "And now you can do the same for me."

"Anything, anything! You must have some more hats."

"I don't want any more hats. I want to go with you on Lord Mountry's yacht to the Riviera."

"Of course," said Mrs. Ford, after a slight pause, "it isn't my party, you know, dear."

"No, but you can work me in, darling."

"It's quite a small party—very quiet."

"Crowds bore me. I enjoy quiet."

Mrs. Ford capitulated.

"You are doing me a very good turn," she said. "You must certainly come on the yacht."

"I'll tell Peter to come straight round here now," said Cynthia simply.

She went to the telephone.

III

[From this point the story is narrated by Mr. Peter Burns]

I AM strongly of the opinion that after the age of twenty-one a man ought not to be out of bed and awake at four o'clock in the morning. The hour breeds thought. At twenty-one, life being all future, it may be examined with impunity; but at thirty, having become an uncomfortable mixture of future and past, it is a thing to be looked

at only when the sun is high and the world full of warmth and optimism.

This thought came to me as I returned to my rooms after the Fletchers' ball. The dawn was breaking as I let myself in. The air was heavy with the peculiar desolation of a London winter morning. The houses looked dead and untenanted. Across the gray street a dingy black cat, moving furtively along the pavement, gave an additional touch of forlornness to the scene.

I shivered. I was tired and hungry, and the reaction after the emotions of the night had left me dispirited.

I was engaged to be married. An hour back I had proposed to Cynthia Drassilis; and I can honestly say that it had come as a great surprise to me.

Why had I done it? Did I love her?

It is difficult to analyze love; but perhaps the mere fact that I was attempting the task was an answer to the question. Certainly, I had never tried to do so five years ago, when I had loved Audrey Blake. I had let myself be carried on from day to day in a sort of trance, content to be utterly happy, without dissecting my happiness. But I was five years younger then, and Audrey was—Audrey.

I must explain Audrey, for she in her turn explains Cynthia.

I have no illusions regarding my character when I first met Audrey Blake. Nature had given me the soul of a pig, and circumstances had conspired to carry on nature's work. I loved comfort, and I could afford to have it.

From the moment when I came of age and relieved my trustees of the care of my money, I wrapped myself in comfort as in a garment. I wallowed in egoism. In fact, if, between my twenty-first and twenty-fifth birthdays I had one unselfish thought, or did one genuinely unselfish action, my memory is a blank on the point.

It was at the height of this period that I became engaged to Audrey. Now that I can understand her better and see myself, impartially, as I was in those days, I can realize how indescribably offensive I must have been. My love was real, but that did not prevent its patronizing complacency being an insult. I was King Cophetua. If I did not actually say in so many words, "This beggar maid shall be my queen," I said it plainly and often in my manner.

She was the daughter of a dissolute, evil-tempered artist whom I had met at a Bo-

hemian club. He made a living by painting an occasional picture, illustrating an occasional magazine story, but mainly by doing advertisement work. A proprietor of a patent infants' food, not satisfied with the bare statement that baby cried for it, would feel it necessary to push the fact home to the public through the medium of art, and Mr. Blake would be commissioned to draw the picture. A good many specimens of his work in this vein were to be found in the back pages of the magazines.

A man may make a living by such means, but it is one that inclines him to jump at a wealthy son-in-law. Mr. Blake jumped at me. It was one of his last acts on this earth. A week after he had—as I now suspect—bullied Audrey into accepting me, he died of pneumonia.

His death had several results. It postponed the wedding; it stirred me to a very crescendo of patronage, for with the removal of the bread-winner the only flaw in my Cophetua pose had vanished; and it gave Audrey a great deal more scope than she had hitherto had for the exercise of free will in the choice of a husband.

This last aspect of the matter was speedily brought to my notice, which till then it had escaped, by a letter from her, handed to me one night at the club, where I was sipping coffee and musing on the excellence of life in this best of all possible worlds.

It was brief and to the point. She had been married that morning.

To say that that moment was a turning-point in my life would be to use a ridiculously inadequate phrase. It dynamited my existence. In a sense, it killed me. The man I had been died that night, regretted, I imagine, by few. Whatever I am to-day, I am certainly not the complacent spectator of life that I had been before that crisis.

I crushed the letter in my hand, and sat staring at it, my pigsty in ruins about my ears, face to face with the fact that, even in the best of all possible worlds, money will not buy everything.

I remember that as I sat there a man—a club acquaintance, a bore from whom I had fled many a time—came and settled down beside me and began to talk. He was a small man, but he possessed a voice to which one had to listen. He talked and talked and talked. How I loathed him, as I sat trying to think through his stream of words!

I see now that he saved me. He forced me out of myself. But at the time he oppressed me.

I was raw and bleeding. I was struggling to grasp the incredible. I had taken Audrey's unalterable affection for granted. She was the natural complement to my scheme of comfort. I wanted her; I had chosen and was satisfied with her; therefore all was well. And now I had to adjust my mind to the impossible fact that I had lost her.

Her letter was a mirror in which I saw myself. She said little, but I understood, and my self-satisfaction was in ribbons—and so was something deeper than self-satisfaction. I saw now that I loved Audrey as I had not dreamed myself capable of loving.

And all the while this man talked and talked.

I have a theory that speech, persevered in, is more efficacious in times of trouble than silent sympathy. Up to a certain point it maddens almost beyond endurance; but, that point past, it soothes. At least, it was so in my case.

Gradually I found myself hating the fellow less. Soon I began to listen, then to answer. Before I left the club that night the first mad frenzy, in which I could have been capable of anything, had gone from me, and I walked home, feeling curiously weak and helpless, but calm, to begin the new life.

Three years passed before I met Cynthia. I spent those years wandering in many countries. At last, as one is apt to do, I drifted back to London, and settled down again to a life which, superficially, was much the same as the one I had led in the days before I knew Audrey. My old circle in London had been wide, and I found it easy to pick up dropped threads. I made new friends, among them Cynthia Drassilis.

I liked Cynthia, and I was sorry for her. I think that, about the time I met her, I was sorry for most people. The shock of Audrey's departure had had that effect upon me. It is always the worst sinner who gets religion most strongly at the camp-meeting, and in my case "getting religion" had taken the form of suppression of self.

I never have been able to do things by halves, or even with a decent moderation. As an egoist, I had been thorough in my egoism; and now, fate having bludgeoned

that vice out of me, I found myself possessed of an almost morbid sympathy with the troubles of other people.

I was extremely sorry for Cynthia Drassilis. Meeting her mother frequently, I could hardly fail to be. Mrs. Drassilis was a representative of a type I disliked. She was a widow who had been left with what she considered insufficient means, and her outlook on life was a compound of greed and querulousness.

Sloane Square and South Kensington are full of women in her situation. Their position resembles that of the *Ancient Mariner*—"water, water, everywhere, nor any drop to drink." For "water" in their case substitute "money." Mrs. Drassilis was connected with money on all sides, but could only obtain it in rare and minute quantities.

Any one of a dozen relations-in-law could, if they had wished, have trebled her annual income without feeling it; but they did not so wish. They disapproved of Mrs. Drassilis. In their opinion the Hon. Hugo Drassilis had married beneath him—not so far beneath him as to make the thing a horror to be avoided in conversation and thought, but far enough to render them coldly polite to his wife during his lifetime and almost icy to his widow after his death.

Hugo's eldest brother, the Earl of Westbourne, had never liked the obviously beautiful but equally obviously second-rate daughter of a provincial solicitor whom Hugo had suddenly presented to the family as his bride. He considered that by doubling the income derived from Hugo's life insurance, and inviting Cynthia to the family seat once a year during her childhood, he had done all that could be expected of him in the matter.

Mrs. Drassilis, however, expected a great deal more of him, the non-receipt of which had spoiled her temper, her looks, and the peace of mind of all who had much to do with her.

It used to irritate me when I overheard people, as I occasionally have done, speak of Cynthia as hard. I never found her so myself, though Heaven knows she had enough to make her so. To me she was always a sympathetic, charming friend.

Ours was a friendship almost untouched by sex. Our minds fitted so smoothly into each other that I had no inclination to fall in love. I knew her too well. I had no

discoveries to make about her. Her honest, simple soul had always been open to me to read. There was none of that curiosity, that sense of something beyond that makes for love. We had reached a point of comradeship beyond which neither of us desired to pass.

Yet at the Fletchers' ball I asked Cynthia to marry me, and she consented.

Looking back, I can see that, though the determining cause was Mr. Tankerville Gifford, it was Audrey who was responsible. She had made me human, capable of sympathy, and it was sympathy, primarily, that led me to say what I said that night. But the immediate cause was certainly young Mr. Gifford.

I arrived at Marlow Square, where I was to pick up Cynthia and her mother, a little late, and found Mrs. Drassilis, florid and overdressed, in the drawing-room with a sleek-haired, pale young man, whom I knew as Tankerville Gifford. To his intimates, of whom I was not one, and in the personal paragraphs of the colored sporting weeklies, he was "Tanky." I had seen him frequently at restaurants. Once, at the Empire, somebody had introduced me to him; but, as he was not sober at the moment, he had missed any intellectual pleasure my acquaintanceship might have afforded him.

Like everybody else who moves about in London, I knew all about him. To sum him up, he was a most unspeakable little cad, and, if the drawing-room had not been Mrs. Drassilis's, I should have wondered at finding him in it.

Mrs. Drassilis introduced us.

"I think we have already met," I said.

He stared glassily.

"Don't remember."

I was not surprised.

At this moment Cynthia came in. Out of the corner of my eye I saw a look of fuddled displeasure come into Tanky's face at her frank pleasure at finding me there.

I had never seen her looking better. She is a tall girl who carries herself magnificently. The simplicity of her dress gained an added dignity from comparison with the rank glitter of her mother's. She wore unrelieved black, a color which set off to wonderful advantage the clear white of her skin and her pale-gold hair.

"You're late, Peter," she said, looking at the clock.

"I know. I'm sorry."

"Better be pushing. What?" suggested Tanky.

"My cab's waiting," I replied.

"Will you ring the bell, Mr. Gifford?" said Mrs. Drassilis. "I will tell Parker to whistle for another."

"Take me in yours," I heard a voice whisper in my ear.

I looked at Cynthia. Her expression had not changed. Then I looked at Tanky Gifford, and I understood. I had seen that stuffed-fish look on his face before—on the occasion when I had been introduced to him at the Empire.

"If you and Mr. Gifford will take my cab," I said to Mrs. Drassilis, "we will follow."

Mrs. Drassilis blocked the motion. I imagine that the sharp note in her voice was lost on Tanky, but it rang out like a clarion to me.

"I am in no hurry," she said. "Mr. Gifford, will you take Cynthia? I will follow with Mr. Burns. You will meet Parker on the stairs. Tell him to call another cab."

As the door closed behind them she turned on me like a many-colored snake.

"How *can* you be so extraordinarily tactless, Peter?" she cried. "You're a perfect fool! Have you no eyes?"

"I'm sorry," I said.

"He's devoted to her."

"I'm sorry."

"What do you mean?"

"Sorry for her."

She seemed to draw herself together inside her dress. Her eyes glittered. My mouth felt very dry, and my heart was beginning to thump. We were both furiously angry. It was a moment that had been coming for years, and we both knew it. For my part I was glad that it had come. On subjects on which one feels deeply it is a relief to speak one's mind.

"Oh!" she said at last. Her voice quivered. She was clutching at her self-control as it slipped from her. "Oh! And what is my daughter to you, Mr. Burns?"

"A great friend."

"And I suppose you think it friendly to try to spoil her chances?"

"If Tankerville Gifford is a sample of them, yes."

"What do you mean?" She choked.

"I see. I understand. I am going to put a stop to this once and for all. Do you

hear? I have noticed it for a long time. Because I have given you the run of the house, and allowed you to come in and out as you pleased, like a tame cat, you presume—"

"Presume?" I repeated.

"You come here and stand in Cynthia's way. You trade on the fact that you have known us all this time to monopolize her attention. You spoil her chances. You—"

The invaluable Parker entered to say that the cab was at the door.

We drove to the Fletchers' house in silence. The spell had been broken. Neither of us could recapture that first fine, careless rapture which had carried us through the opening stages of the conflict, and discussion of the subject on a less exalted plane was impossible. It was that blessed period of calm, the rest between rounds, and we observed it to the full.

When I reached the ballroom, a waltz was just finishing. Cynthia, a statue in black, was dancing with Tanky Gifford. They were opposite me when the music stopped, and she caught sight of me over his shoulder.

She disengaged herself and moved quickly toward me.

"Take me away," she said under her breath. "Anywhere—quick!"

It was no time to consider the etiquette of the ballroom. Tanky, startled at his sudden loneliness, seemed by his expression to be endeavoring to bring his mind to bear on the matter. A couple making for the door cut us off from him, and, following them, we passed out.

Neither of us spoke till we had reached a little room where we were the only people in sight. She sat down. She was looking pale and tired.

"Oh dear!" she said.

I understood. I seemed to see that journey in the cab, those dances, those terrible between-dances.

It was very sudden.

I took her hand. She turned to me with a tired smile. There were tears in her eyes. I heard myself speaking.

Then she was looking at me, her eyes shining. All the weariness seemed to have gone out of them.

I looked at her.

There was something missing. I had felt it when I was speaking. To me, my voice had had no ring of conviction. And then I saw what it was. There was no

mystery. We knew each other too well. Friendship kills love.

She put my thought into words.

"We have always been brother and sister," she said doubtfully.

"Till to-night."

"You have changed to-night? You really want me?"

Did I? I tried to put the question to myself and answer it honestly. Yes, in a sense, I had changed to-night. There was an added appreciation of her fineness, a quickening of that blend of admiration and pity which I had always felt for her. I wanted with all my heart to help her, to take her away from her dreadful surroundings, to make her happy. But did I want her in the sense in which she had used the word? Did I want her as I had wanted Audrey Blake?

I winced away from the question. Audrey belonged to the dead past, but it hurt to think of her.

Was it merely because I was five years older now than when I had wanted Audrey that the fire had gone out of me?

I shut my mind against my doubts.

"I have changed to-night," I said; and I bent down and kissed her.

I was conscious of being defiant against somebody; and then I knew that the somebody was myself.

IV

I POURED myself out a cup of hot coffee from the flask which Smith, my man, had filled against my return. It put life into me. The oppression lifted; and yet there remained something that made for uneasiness, a sort of foreboding at the back of my mind.

I had taken a step in the dark, and I was afraid for Cynthia. I had undertaken to give her happiness. Was I certain that I could succeed? The glow of chivalry had left me, and I began to doubt.

Audrey had taken from me something that I could not recover. Poetry was as near as I could get to a definition of it. Yes, poetry! With Cynthia my feet would always be on the solid earth. To the end of the chapter we should be friends, and nothing more.

I found myself pitying Cynthia intensely. I saw her future a series of years of intolerable dullness. She was too good to be tied for life to a battered hulk like myself.

I drank more coffee, and my mood changed. Even in the gray of a winter morning a man of thirty, in excellent health, cannot pose to himself for long as a piece of human junk, especially if he comforts himself with hot coffee.

My mind resumed its balance. I laughed at myself as a sentimental fraud. Of course I could make her happy! No man and woman had ever been more admirably suited to each other. As for that first disaster, which I had been magnifying into a life tragedy, what of it? An incident of my boyhood. A ridiculous episode which—I rose with the intention of doing so at once—I would now proceed to eliminate from my life.

I went quickly to my desk, unlocked it, and took out a photograph. Then—undoubtedly four o'clock in the morning is no time for a man to try to be single-minded and decisive—I wavered. I had intended to tear the thing in pieces without a glance, and fling it into the waste-paper basket; but I took the glance and I hesitated.

The girl in the photograph was small and slight, and she looked straight out of the picture with large eyes that met and challenged mine. How well I remembered them, those Irish blue eyes under their expressive, rather heavy brows! How exactly the photographer had caught that half-wistful, half-impudent look, the chin tilted, the mouth curving into a smile!

In a wave all my doubts had surged back upon me. Was this mere sentimentalism, a four-in-the-morning tribute to the pathos of the flying years, or did she really fill my soul and stand guard over it so that no successor could enter in and usurp her place?

I had no answer, unless the fact that I replaced the photograph in its drawer was one. I felt that the question could not be decided now. It was more difficult than I had thought.

All my gloom had returned by the time I was in bed. Hours seemed to pass while I tossed restlessly, aching for sleep.

When I woke, my last coherent thought was still clear in my mind. It was a passionate vow that, come what might, if those Irish eyes were to haunt me till my death, I would play the game loyally with Cynthia!

The telephone-bell rang just as I was getting ready to call at Marlow Square and

inform Mrs. Drassilis of the position of affairs. Cynthia, I imagined, would have broken the news already, which would mitigate the embarrassment of the interview to some extent; but the recollection of my last night's encounter with Mrs. Drassilis prevented me from looking forward with any joy to the prospect of meeting her again.

Cynthia's voice greeted me as I unhooked the receiver.

"Hello, Peter! Is that you? I want you to come round here at once."

"I was just starting," I said.

"I don't mean Marlow Square. I'm not there. I'm at the Guelph. Ask for Mrs. Ford's suite. It's very important. I'll tell you all about it when you get here. Come as soon as you can."

My rooms were conveniently situated for visits to the Hotel Guelph. A walk of a couple of minutes took me there. Mrs. Ford's suite was on the third floor. I rang the bell, and Cynthia promptly opened the door to me.

"Come in," she said. "You're a dear to be so quick!"

"My rooms are only just round the corner."

She shut the door, and for the first time we looked at each other. I could not say that I was nervous, but there was certainly, to me, something strange in the atmosphere. Last night seemed a long way off, and somehow a little unreal. I suppose I must have shown this in my manner, for she suddenly broke what had amounted to a distinct pause by giving a little laugh.

"Peter," she said, "you're embarrassed."

I denied the charge warmly, but without real conviction. I was embarrassed.

"Then you ought to be," she said.

"Last night, when I was looking my very best in a lovely dress, you asked me to marry you. Now you see me again in cold blood, and you're wondering how you can back out of it without hurting my feelings."

I smiled. She did not.

I ceased to smile. She was looking at me in a very peculiar manner.

"Peter," she said, "are you sure?"

"My dear old Cynthia," I said, "what's the matter with you?"

"You are sure?" she persisted.

"Absolutely, entirely sure." I had a vision of two large eyes looking at me out of a photograph. It came and went in a flash. I kissed Cynthia. "What quantities of

hair you have!" I said. "It's a shame to cover it up." She was not responsive. "You're in a very queer mood to-day, Cynthia," I went on. "What's the matter?"

"I've been thinking."

"Out with it! Something has gone wrong." An idea flashed upon me. "Er—has your mother—is your mother very angry about—"

"Mother's delighted. She always liked you, Peter."

I had the self-restraint to check a grin.

"Then what is it?" I said. "Tired after the dance?"

"Nothing as simple as that."

"Tell me!"

"It's so difficult to put it into words."

"Try."

She was playing with the papers on the table, her face turned away. For a moment she did not speak.

"I've been worrying myself, Peter," she said at last. "You are so chivalrous and unselfish. You're quixotic. It's that that is troubling me. Are you marrying me just because you're sorry for me? Don't speak. I can tell you now, if you will just let me say straight out what's in my mind. We have known each other for two years. You know all about me. You know how—how unhappy I am at home. Are you marrying me just because you pity me and want to take me out of all that?"

"My dear girl!"

"You haven't answered my question."

"I answered it two minutes ago, when you asked me if—"

"You do love me?"

"Yes."

All this time she had been keeping her face averted, but now she turned and looked into my eyes with an abrupt intensity which, I confess, startled me. Her words startled me more.

"Peter, do you love me as much as you loved Audrey Blake?"

In the instant which divided her words from my reply my mind flew hither and thither, trying to recall an occasion when I could have mentioned Audrey to her. I was convinced that I had not done so. I never mentioned Audrey to any one.

There is a grain of superstition in the most level-headed man. I am not particularly level-headed, and I have more than a grain in me. I was shaken. Ever since I had asked Cynthia to marry me it seemed

as if the ghost of Audrey had come back into my life.

"Good Lord!" I cried. "What do you know of Audrey Blake?"

She turned her face away again.

"Her name seems to affect you very strongly," she said quietly.

I recovered myself.

"If you ask an old soldier," I said, "he will tell you that a wound, long after it has healed, is apt to give you an occasional twinge."

"Not if it has really healed!"

"Yes, when it has really healed—when you can hardly remember how you were fool enough to get it."

She said nothing.

"How did you hear about—it?" I asked.

"When I first met you, or soon after, a friend of yours—we happened to be talking about you—told me that you had been engaged to be married to a girl named Audrey Blake. He was to have been your best man, he said, but one day you wrote and told him there would be no wedding, and then disappeared; and nobody saw you again for three years."

"Yes," I said. "That is all quite true."

"It seems to have been a serious affair, Peter—I mean the sort of thing a man would find it hard to forget."

I tried to smile, but I knew that I was not doing it well. It was hurting me extraordinarily, this discussion of Audrey.

"A man would find it almost impossible," I said, "unless he had a remarkably poor memory."

"I didn't mean that. You know what I mean by forget."

"Yes," I said, "I do."

She came quickly to me and took me by the shoulders, looking into my face.

"Peter, can you honestly say you have forgotten her—in the sense I mean?"

"Yes," I said.

Again that feeling swept over me—that curious sensation of being defiant against myself.

"She does not stand between us?"

"No," I said.

I could feel the effort behind the word. It was as if some subconscious part of me were working to keep it back.

"Peter!"

There was a soft smile on her face as she raised it to mine. I put my arms round her. She drew away with a little laugh.

Her whole manner had changed. She was a different being from the girl who had looked so gravely into my eyes a moment before.

"Oh, my dear boy, how terribly muscular you are! You've crushed me. I expect you used to be splendid at football, like Mr. Broster."

I did not reply at once. I cannot wrap up the deeper emotions and put them back on their shelf as soon as I have no further immediate use for them. I slowly adjusted myself to the new key of the conversation.

"Who's Broster?" I asked at length.

"He used to be tutor to"—she turned me round and pointed—"to that."

When I entered the room I had seen a picture standing on one of the chairs, but had taken no particular notice of it. I now gave it a closer glance. It was an oil portrait, very crudely done, of a singularly repulsive-looking child of about ten or eleven years old.

"Was he, poor chap? Well, we all have our troubles, don't we? Who is this young thug? Not a friend of yours, I hope?"

"That is Ogden, Mrs. Ford's son. It's a tragedy—"

"Perhaps it doesn't do him justice. Does he really squint like that, or is it just the artist's imagination?"

"Don't make fun of it. It's the loss of that boy that is breaking Nesta's heart."

I was shocked.

"Is he dead? I'm awfully sorry. I wouldn't for the world—"

"No, no! He is alive and well; but he is dead to her. The court gave him into the custody of his father."

"The court?"

"Mrs. Ford was the wife of Elmer Ford, the American millionaire. They were divorced a year ago."

"I see!"

Cynthia was gazing at the portrait.

"This boy is quite a celebrity in his way," she said. "They call him the Little Nugget in America."

"Oh? Why is that?"

"It's a nickname the kidnapers have for him. Ever so many attempts have been made to steal him."

She stopped and looked at me oddly.

"I made one to-day, Peter," she said.

"I went down to the country, where the boy was, and kidnaped him."

"Cynthia! What on earth do you mean?"

"Don't you understand? I did it for Nesta's sake. She was breaking her heart about not being able to see him, so I slipped down, stole him away, and brought him back here."

I do not know whether I was looking as amazed as I felt. I hope not, for I felt as if my brain were giving way. The perfect calmness with which Cynthia spoke of this extraordinary freak only added to my confusion.

"You're joking!"

"No, I stole him."

"But the law! It's a penal offense, you know!"

"Well, I did it. Men like Elmer Ford aren't fit to have charge of a child. You don't know him, but he's just an unscrupulous financier, without a thought above money. To think of a boy growing up in that tainted atmosphere—at his most impressionable age—it means death to any good there is in him."

My mind was still grappling feebly with the legal aspect of the affair.

"But, Cynthia, kidnaping's kidnaping, you know! The law doesn't take any notice of motives. If you're caught—"

She cut through my babble.

"Would you have been afraid to do it, Peter?"

"Well—" I began. I had not considered the point before.

"I don't believe you would. If I asked you to do it for my sake—"

"But, Cynthia, kidnaping, you know! It's such an infernally low-down game."

"I played it. Do you despise *me*?"

I perspired. I could think of no other reply.

"Peter," she said, "I understand your scruples. I know exactly how you feel. But can't you see that this is quite different from the sort of kidnaping you naturally look on as horrible? It's just taking a boy away from surroundings that must harm him, back to his mother, who worships him. It's not wrong. It's splendid!" She paused. "You *will* do it for me, Peter?" she said.

"I don't understand," I said feebly. "It's already done. You've kidnaped him yourself."

"They tracked him and took him back. Now I want *you* to try." She came closer to me. "Peter, don't you see what it will mean to me, if you agree to try? I'm only human. I can't help, at the bottom of my

heart, still being a little jealous of this Audrey Blake. No, don't say anything. Words can't cure me; but if you do this thing for me, I shall be satisfied. I shall *know*!"

She was close beside me, holding my arm and looking into my face. That sense of the unreality of things which had haunted me since that moment at the dance came over me with renewed intensity. Life had ceased to be a rather gray, orderly business in which day succeeded day calmly and without event. Its steady stream had broken up into rapids, and I was being whirled away on them.

"Will you do it, Peter? Say you will!"

A voice, presumably mine, answered:

"Yes."

"My dear old boy!" She pushed me into a chair, and, sitting on the arm of it, laid her hand on mine, and became of a sudden wondrously businesslike. "Listen, Peter," she said. "I'll tell you what we have arranged."

It was borne in upon me, as she began to do so, that she appeared from the very beginning to have been extremely confident that that essential part of her plans, my consent to the scheme, could be relied upon as something of a certainty. Women have these intuitions.

V

LOOKING back, I think I can fix the point at which this insane venture I had undertaken ceased to be a distorted dream, from which I vaguely hoped that I might shortly awake, and took shape as a reality of the immediate future. That moment came when I met Mr. Arnold Abney by appointment at his club.

Till then the whole enterprise had been visionary. I gathered from Cynthia that the boy Ogden was shortly to be sent to a preparatory school, and that I was to insinuate myself into this school and, watching my opportunity, to remove him; but it seemed to me that the obstacles to this comparatively lucid scheme were insuperable.

In the first place, how were we to discover which of England's countless preparatory schools Mr. Ford, or Mr. Mennick for him, would choose?

Secondly, the plot which was to carry me triumphantly into this school when—or if—found, struck me as extremely thin. I was to pose, Cynthia told me, as a young man of private means, anxious to learn the

business with a view to setting up a school of his own. The objection to that was, I held, that I obviously did not want to do anything of the sort. I had not the appearance or the manner of a man with such an ambition. I had none of the conversation of such a man.

I put it to Cynthia.

"They would find me out in a day," I assured her. "A man who wants to set up a school has to be a pretty brainy sort of fellow. I don't know anything."

"You got your degree."

"A degree. At any rate, I've forgotten all I knew."

"That doesn't matter. You have the money. Anybody with money can start a school, even if he doesn't know a thing. Nobody would think it strange."

It struck me as a monstrous slur on our educational system, but reflection told me that it was true. The proprietor of a preparatory school, if he is a man of means, need not be able to teach, any more than an impresario need be able to write operas.

"Well, we'll pass that for the moment," I said. "Here's the real difficulty. How are you going to find out the school Mr. Ford has chosen?"

"I have found it out already—or Nesta has. She set a detective to work. It was perfectly easy. Ogden is going to Mr. Abney's. Sanstead House is the name of the place. It's in Hampshire somewhere—quite a small school, but full of little dukes and earls and things. Lord Mountry's younger brother, Augustus Beckford, is there."

"Mountry? Do you know him? He was up at Oxford with me."

She seemed interested.

"What kind of a man is he?" she asked.

"Oh, quite a good sort. Rather an ass. I haven't seen him for years."

"He's a friend of Nesta's. I've only met him once. He is going to be your reference."

"My what?"

"You will need a reference. At least, I suppose you will. Anyhow, if you say you know Lord Mountry, it will make it simpler for you with Mr. Abney, the brother being at the school."

"Does Mountry know about this business? Have you told him why I want to go to Abney's?"

"Nesta told him. He thought it was very sporting of you. He will tell Mr. Abney anything we like. By the way, Peter,

you will have to pay a premium or something, I suppose; but Nesta will look after all expenses, of course."

On this point I made my only stand of the afternoon.

"No," I said, "it's very kind of her, but this is going to be entirely an amateur performance. I'm doing this for you, and I'll stand the racket. Good Heavens! Fancy taking money for a job of this kind!"

She looked at me rather oddly.

"That is very sweet of you, Peter," she said, after a slight pause. "Now let's get to work."

And together we composed the letter which led to my sitting, two days later, in stately conference at his club with Mr. Arnold Abney, A.M., of Sanstead House, Hampshire.

Mr. Abney proved to be a tall, suave, benevolent man with an Oxford manner, a high forehead, thin, white hands, a cooing intonation, and a general air of hushed importance, as of one in constant communication with the great. There was in his bearing something of the family solicitor, in whom dukes confide, and something of the private chaplain at the castle.

He gave me a key to his character in the first minute of our acquaintanceship. We had seated ourselves at a table in the smoking-room, when an elderly gentleman shuffled past, giving a nod in transit. My companion sprang to his feet almost convulsively, returned the salutation, and subsided slowly into his chair again.

"The Duke of Devizes," he said in an undertone. "A most able man—most able! His nephew, Lord Ronald Stokeschaye, was one of my pupils. A charming boy!"

I gathered that the old feudal spirit still glowed in Mr. Abney's bosom.

We came to business.

"So you wish to be one of us, Mr. Burns—to enter the scholastic profession?"

I tried to look as if I did.

"Well, in certain circumstances, the circumstances in which I—ah—myself, I may say, am situated, there is no more delightful occupation. The work is interesting. There is the constant fascination of seeing these fresh young lives develop—and of helping them to develop—under one's eyes. In my case, I may say, there is the exceptional interest of being in a position to mold the growing minds of lads who will some day take their place among the

country's hereditary legislators, that little knot of devoted men who, despite the vulgar attacks of loud-mouthed demagogues, still do their share, and more, in the guidance of England's fortunes. Yes!"

He paused. I said I thought so, too.

"You are an Oxford man, Mr. Burns, I think you told me? Ah, I have your letter here. Just so. You were at—ah, yes! A fine college. The dean is a lifelong friend of mine. Perhaps you knew my late pupil, Lord Rollo—no, he would have been since your time. A delightful boy—quite delightful! And you took your degree? Exactly. And represented the university at both cricket and Rugby football? Excellent! *Mens sana in—ah—corpore*, in fact, *sano*, yes!"

He folded the letter carefully and replaced it in his pocket.

"Your primary object in coming to me, Mr. Burns, is, I gather, to learn the—ah—the ropes, the business? You have had little or no previous experience of schoolmastering?"

"None whatever."

"Then your best plan would undoubtedly be to work for a time simply as an ordinary assistant master. You would thus get a sound knowledge of the intricacies of the profession which would stand you in good stead when you decide to set up your own school. Schoolmastering is a profession which cannot be taught adequately except in practise. Only those who—ah—brave its dangers comprehend its mystery. Yes, I should certainly recommend you to begin at the foot of the ladder and go, at least for a time, through the mill."

"Certainly," I said. "No doubt you are right."

My ready acquiescence pleased him. I could see that he was relieved. I think he had expected me to jibe at the prospect of actual work.

"As it happens," he said, "my classical master left me at the end of last term. I was about to go to the agency for a successor when your letter arrived. Would you consider—"

I had to think this over. Feeling kindly disposed toward Mr. Arnold Abney, I wished to do him as little harm as possible. I was going to rob him of a boy who, while no molding of his growing mind could make him into a hereditary legislator, did undoubtedly represent a portion of Mr. Abney's annual income; and I did not want to

increase my offense by being a useless assistant master. Then I reflected that, if I was no Jowett, at least I knew enough Latin and Greek to teach the rudiments of those languages to small boys. My conscience was satisfied.

"I should be delighted," I said.

"Excellent! Then let us consider that as—ah—settled," said Mr. Abney.

There was a pause. My companion began to fiddle a little uncomfortably with an ash-tray. I wondered what was the matter; and then it came to me. We were about to become sordid. The discussion of terms was upon us.

As I realized this, I saw simultaneously how I could throw one more sop to my exigent conscience. After all, the whole thing was really a question of hard cash. By kidnaping Ogden, I should be taking money from Mr. Abney. By paying my premium I should be giving it back to him.

I considered the circumstances. Ogden was now about thirteen years old. The age-limit for preparatory schools may be estimated roughly at fourteen. That is to say, in any event Sanstead House could harbor him for only one more year. Mr. Abney's fees I had to guess at. To be on the safe side, I fixed my premium at an outside figure; and, getting to the point at once, I named it.

It was entirely satisfactory. My mental arithmetic had done me credit. Mr. Abney beamed upon me. Over tea and muffins we became very friendly. In half an hour I heard more of the theory of schoolmastering than I had dreamed existed.

We said good-by at the club front door. He smiled down at me benevolently from the top of the steps.

"Good-by, Mr. Burns, good-by," he said. "We shall meet at—ah—Philippi!"

When I reached my rooms I rang for Smith.

"Smith," I said, "I want you to get some books for me first thing to-morrow. You had better take a note of them."

He moistened his pencil.

"A Latin grammar."

"Yes, sir."

"A Greek grammar."

"Yes, sir."

"Bradley Arnold's 'Easy Prose Sentences.'"

"Yes, sir."

"And Cæsar's 'Gallic War.'"

"What name, sir?"

"Cæsar."

"Thank you, sir. Anything else, sir?"

"No, that will be all."

"Very good, sir."

He shimmered from the room.

Thank goodness, Smith always has thought me mad, and is consequently never surprised at anything I ask him to do!

VI

SANSTEAD HOUSE was an imposing building in the Georgian style. It stood, foursquare, in the midst of about nine acres of land. For the greater part of its existence, I learned later, it had been the private home of a family of the name of Boone, and in its early days the estate had been considerable; but the progress of the years had brought changes to the Boones.

Money losses had necessitated the sale of land. New roads had come into being, cutting off portions of the estate from the rest. New facilities for travel had drawn members of the family away from home. The old fixed life of the country had changed, and in the end the latest Boone had come to the conclusion that to keep up so large and expensive a house was not worth his while.

That the place should have become a school was a natural process of evolution. It was too large for the ordinary purchaser, and the estate had been so whittled down in the course of time that it was inadequate for the wealthy. Colonel Boone had been glad to let it to Mr. Abney, and the school had started on its career.

It had all the qualifications for a school. It was isolated. The village was two miles from its gates. It was near the sea. There were fields for cricket and football, and, inside the house, a number of rooms of every size, suitable for class-rooms and dormitories.

The household, when I arrived, consisted, besides Mr. Abney, myself, another master named Glossop, and the matron, of twenty-four boys, the butler, the cook, the odd-job man, two housemaids, a scullery maid, and a parlor maid. It was a little colony cut off from the outer world.

With the exception of Mr. Abney and Glossop, a dismal man of nerves and mannerisms, the only person with whom I exchanged speech on my first evening was White, the butler. There are some men one likes at sight. White was one of them.

Even for a butler he was a man of remarkably smooth manners, but he lacked that quality of austere aloofness which I have noticed in other butlers.

He helped me unpack my box, and we chatted during the process. He was a man of medium height, square and muscular, with something, some quality of springiness, as it were, that seemed unusual in a butler. From one or two things he said, I gathered that he had traveled a good deal. Altogether, he interested me. He had humor, and the half-hour which I had spent with Glossop made me set a premium on humor.

I found that White, like myself, was a newcomer. His predecessor had left at short notice during the holidays, and he had secured the vacancy at about the same time that I was securing mine.

We agreed that it was a pretty place. White, I gathered, regarded its isolation as a merit. He was not fond of village society.

On the following morning at eight o'clock my work began.

My first day had the effect of entirely revolutionizing what ideas I had possessed as to the lot of an assistant master in a private school.

My view, till then, had been that the assistant master had an easy time. I had only studied him from the outside. My opinion was based on observations made as a boy at school, when masters were an enviable race who went to bed when they liked, had no preparation to do, and couldn't be caned. It seemed to me then that those three facts, especially the last, formed a pretty good basis on which to build up the perfect life.

I had not been at Sanstead House two days before doubts began to creep in on this point. The boy, observing the assistant master standing about in apparently magnificent idleness, does not realize that that unfortunate is really putting in a spell of exceedingly hard work. He is "taking duty." And "taking duty" is a thing to be remembered, especially by a man who, like myself, has lived a life of fatted ease, protected from all the minor annoyances of life by a substantial income.

Sanstead House educated me. It startled me. It showed me a hundred ways in which I had allowed myself to become soft and inefficient, without being aware of it. There may be other professions which call for a fiercer display of energy, but for the

man with a private income who has loitered through life at his own pace, a little school-mastering is brisk enough to be a wonderful tonic.

I needed it, and I got it.

It was almost as if Mr. Abney had intuitively realized how excellent the discipline of work was for my soul, for the kindly man allowed me to do not only my own, but most of his as well. I have talked with assistant masters since, and I have gathered from them that head masters of private schools are divided into two classes—the workers and the runners-up-to-London. Mr. Abney belonged to the latter class. Indeed, I doubt if a finer representative of the class could have been found in the length and breadth of southern England. London drew him like a magnet.

After breakfast he would take me aside. The formula was always the same.

"Ah—Mr. Burns!"

"Yes? Er—yes?" I would reply, knowing what was coming.

"I am afraid I shall be obliged to run up to London to-day. I have received an important letter from—" He would name some parent or some prospective parent. By "prospective" I mean one who was thinking of sending his son to Sanstead House. You may have twenty children, but unless you send them to his school, a schoolmaster will refuse to dignify you with the name of "parent." "He wishes—ah—to see me," Mr. Abney would continue; or, in the case of a titled parent: "He wishes—ah—to talk things over with me." The distinction was subtle, but he always made it.

And presently the cab would roll away down the long drive, and my work would begin, and with it that soul-discipline to which I have alluded.

"Taking duty" makes certain definite calls upon a man. He has to answer questions; to break up fights; to stop big boys bullying small boys; to prevent small boys bullying smaller boys; to check stone-throwing, going-on-the-wet-grass, worrying-the-cook, teasing-the-dog, making-too-much-noise, and, in particular, to discourage all forms of *hara-kiri* such as tree-climbing, waterspout-scaling, leaning-too-far-out-of-the-window, sliding-down-the-banisters, and ink-drinking-because-somebody-dared-me-to.

At intervals throughout the day there are further feats to perform. Carving the

joint, helping the pudding, playing football, reading prayers, teaching, herding stragglers in for meals, and going round the dormitories to see that the lights are out, are a few of them.

I wanted to oblige Cynthia, if I could, but there were moments during the first day or so when I wondered how on earth I was going to snatch the necessary time to combine kidnaping with my other duties. Of all the learned professions it seemed to me that that of the kidnaper most urgently demanded certain intervals for leisured thought in which schemes and plots might be matured.

Schools vary. Sanstead House belonged to the more difficult class. Mr. Abney's constant flittings did much to add to the burdens of his assistants, and his peculiar reverence for the aristocracy did even more. His endeavor to make Sanstead House a place where the delicately nurtured scions of the governing class might feel as little as possible the temporary loss of titled mothers led him into a benevolent tolerance which would have unsettled angels.

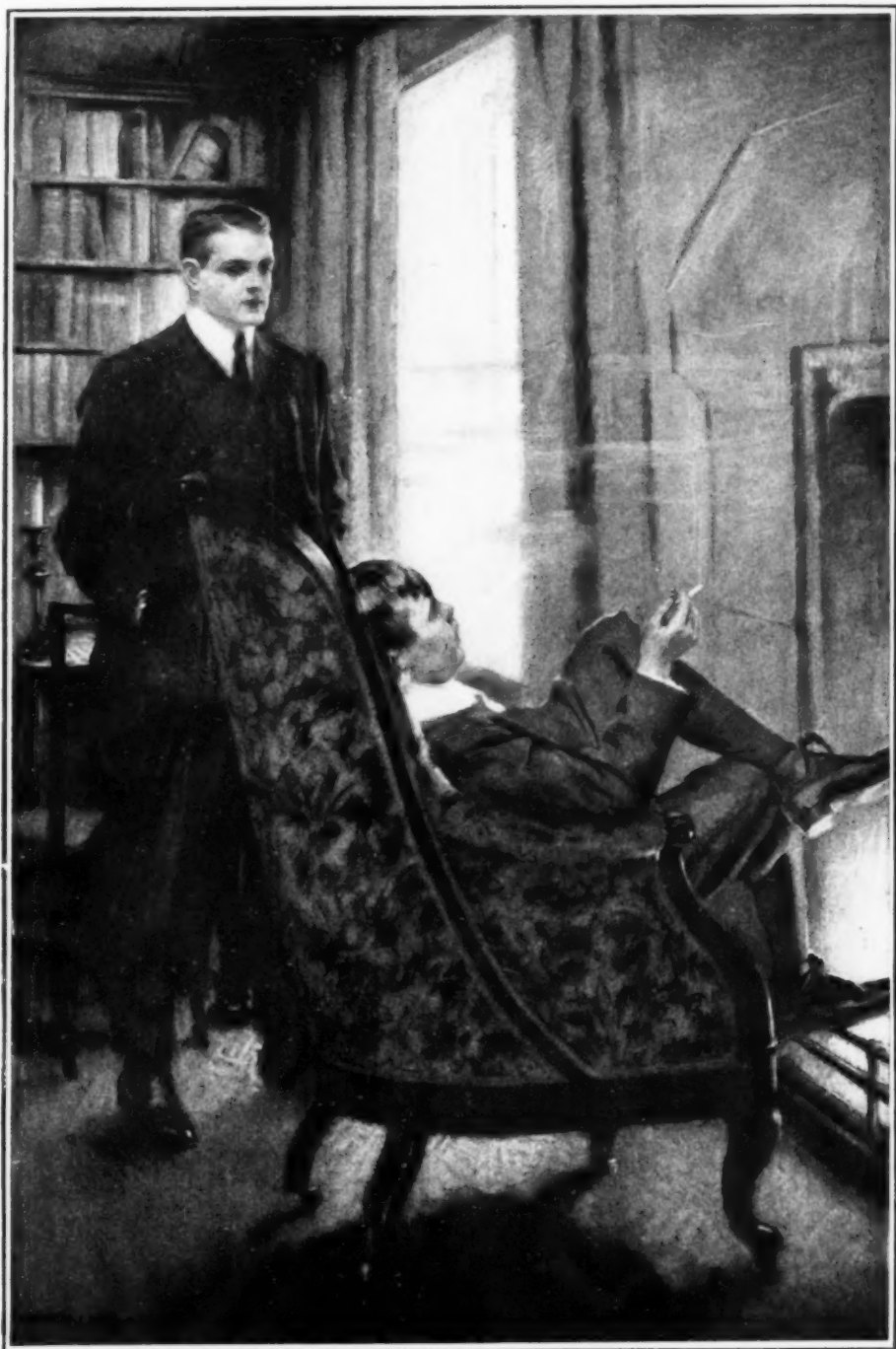
Success or failure for an assistant master is, I consider, very much a matter of luck. My colleague, Glossop, had most of the qualities that make for success, but no luck. Properly backed up by Mr. Abney, he might have kept order. As it was, his classroom was a bear-garden, and, when he took duty, chaos reigned.

I, on the other hand, had luck. For some reason the boys agreed to accept me. Quite early in my sojourn I enjoyed that sweetest triumph of the assistant master's life, the spectacle of one boy smacking another boy's head because the latter persisted in making a noise after I had told him to stop.

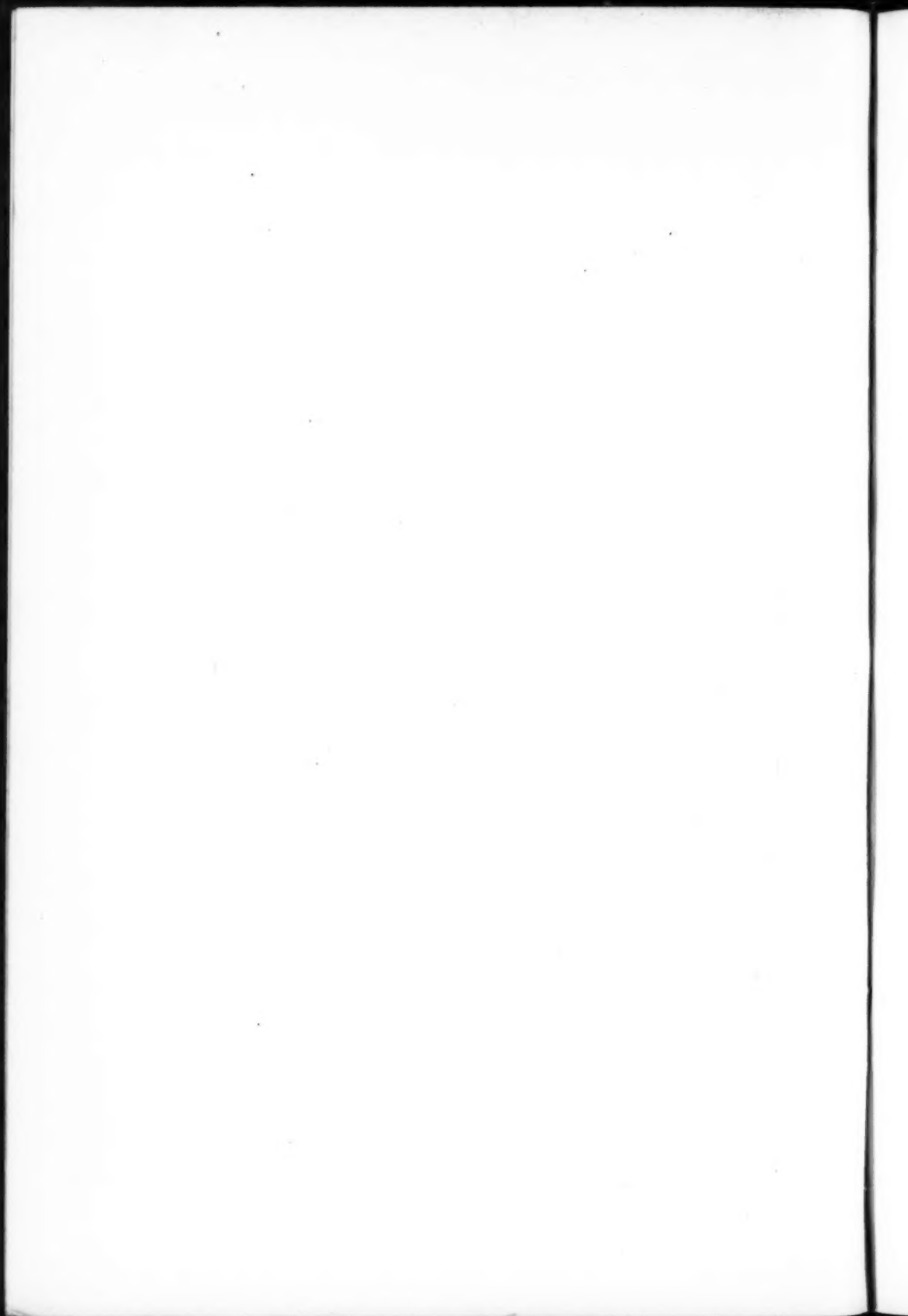
I doubt if a man can experience so keenly in any other way that thrill which comes from the knowledge that the populace is his friend. Political orators must have the same sort of feeling when their audience clamors for the ejection of a heckler, but it cannot be so keen. One is so helpless with boys, unless they decide that they like one.

VII

It was a week from the beginning of the term before I made the acquaintance of the Little Nugget. I had kept my eyes open for him from the beginning, and, when I discovered that he was not at the school, I had felt alarmed. Had Cynthia sent me



"THROW AWAY THAT CIGARETTE!"



down here, to work as I had never worked before, on a wild-geese chase?

Then, one morning, Mr. Abney drew me aside after breakfast.

"Ah—Mr. Burns!"

It was the first time that I had heard those soon-to-be-familiar words.

"I fear I shall be compelled to run up to London to-day. I have an important appointment with the father of a boy who is coming to the school. He wishes—ah—to see me."

This might be the Little Nugget at last.

I was right. During the interval before school, Augustus Beckford approached me. Lord Mountry's brother was a stolid boy with freckles. He had two claims to popular fame. He could hold his breath longer than any other boy in the school, and he always got hold of any piece of gossip first.

"There's a new kid coming to-night, sir," he said. "An American kid. I heard him talking about it to the matron. The kid's name's Ford. I believe the kid's father's awfully rich. Would you like to be rich, sir? I wish I was rich. If I was rich, I'd buy all sorts of things. I believe I'm going to be rich when I grow up. I heard father talking to a lawyer about it. There's a new parlor maid coming soon, sir. I heard cook telling Emily. I'm blowed if I'd like to be a parlor maid, would you, sir? I'd much rather be a cook."

He pondered the point for a moment. When he spoke again, it was to touch on a still more profound problem.

"If you wanted a halfpenny to make up twopence to buy a lizard, what would you do, sir?"

He got it.

Ogden Ford, that Eldorado of the kidnapping industry, entered Sanstead House at a quarter past nine that evening. He was preceded by a worried look, Mr. Arnold Abney, a cabman bearing a large box, and the odd-job man carrying two suit-cases. I have given precedence to the worried look, because it was a thing by itself. To say that Mr. Abney wore it would be to create a wrong impression. Mr. Abney simply followed in its wake. He was concealed behind it much as Macbeth's army was concealed behind the woods of Dunsinane.

I only caught a glimpse of Ogden as Mr. Abney showed him into his study. He seemed a self-possessed boy, very like the

portrait of him which I had seen at the Hotel Guelph, but a little less prepossessing, if anything.

A moment later the door opened, and my employer came out. He appeared relieved at seeing me.

"Ah, Mr. Burns, I was about to go in search of you. Can you spare me a moment? Let us go into the dining-room."

"That is a boy called Ford, Mr. Burns," he said, when he had closed the door. "A rather—er—remarkable boy. He is an American, the son of a Mr. Elmer Ford. As he will be to a great extent in your charge, I should like to prepare you for his—ah—peculiarities."

"Is he peculiar?"

A faint spasm disturbed Mr. Abney's face. He applied a silk handkerchief to his forehead before he replied.

"In many ways, judged by the standard of the lads who have passed through my hands—boys who, it is only fair to add, have enjoyed the advantages of a singularly refined home life—he may be said to be somewhat peculiar. While I have no doubt that *au fond* he is a charming boy, quite charming, at present he is—shall I say?—peculiar. I am disposed to imagine that he has been, from childhood up, systematically indulged. There has been in his life, I suspect, little or no discipline. The result has been to make him curiously unboylike. There is a complete absence of that diffidence, that childish capacity for surprise, which I, for one, find so charming in our English boys. Little Ford appears to be completely *blasé*. He has tastes and ideas which are precocious and—unusual in a boy of his age. He expresses himself in a curious manner sometimes. He seems to have little or no reverence for—ah—constituted authority."

Mr. Abney paused while he passed his handkerchief once more over his forehead.

"Mr. Ford, the boy's father, who struck me as a man of great ability, a typical American merchant prince, was singularly frank with me about his domestic affairs as they concerned his son. I cannot recall his exact words, but the gist of what he said was that, until now, Mrs. Ford had had sole charge of the boy's upbringing, and—Mr. Ford was singularly outspoken—was too indulgent, in fact—ah—spoiled him. Indeed—you will, of course, respect my confidence—that was the real reason for the divorce which—ah—has unhappily

come about. Mr. Ford regards this school as in a measure—shall I say?—an antidote. He wishes there to be no lack of wholesome discipline. So that I shall expect you, Mr. Burns, to check firmly, though of course kindly, such habits of his as—ah—cigarette-smoking. On our journey down he smoked incessantly. I found it impossible—without physical violence—to induce him to stop. But, of course, now that he is actually at the school and subject to the discipline of the school—

"Exactly!" I said.

"That was all I wished to say. Perhaps it would be as well if you saw him now, Mr. Burns. You will find him in the study."

He drifted away, and I went to the study to introduce myself.

A cloud of tobacco-smoke rising above the back of an easy chair greeted me as I opened the door. Moving into the room, I perceived a pair of shoes resting on the grate. I stepped to the right, and the remainder of the Little Nugget came into view.

He was lying almost at full length in the chair, his eyes fixed in dreamy abstraction upon the ceiling. As I came toward him he drew at the cigarette between his fingers, glanced at me, looked away again, and expelled another mouthful of smoke. He was not interested in me.

Perhaps this indifference piqued me, and I saw him with prejudiced eyes. At any rate, he seemed to me a singularly unprepossessing youth. That portrait had flattered him. He had a stout body and a round, unwholesome face. His eyes were dull, and his mouth drooped discontentedly. He had the air of one who is surfeited with life.

I am disposed to imagine, as Mr. Abney would have said, that my manner in addressing him was brisker and more incisive than Mr. Abney's own. I was irritated by his supercilious detachment.

"Throw away that cigarette!" I said.

To my amazement, he did so promptly. I was beginning to wonder whether I had not been too abrupt—he gave me a curious sensation of being a man of my own age—when he produced a silver case from his pocket and opened it. I saw that the cigarette in the fender was a stump.

I took the case from his hand and threw it onto a table. For the first time he seemed really to notice my existence.

"You've got a devil of a nerve!" he said.

He was certainly exhibiting his various gifts in rapid order. This, I took it, was what Mr. Abney had called "expressing himself in a curious manner."

"And don't use bad language," I said.

We eyed each other narrowly for the space of some seconds.

"Who are you?" he demanded.

I introduced myself.

"What do you want to come butting in for?"

"I am paid to butt in. It's the main duty of an assistant master."

"Oh, you're the assistant master, are you?"

"One of them. And, in passing—it's a small technical point—you're supposed to call me 'sir' during these invigorating little chats of ours."

"Call you what? Up an alley!"

"I beg your pardon?"

"Fade away! Take a walk!"

I gathered that he meant to convey that he had considered my proposition, but regretted his inability to entertain it.

"Didn't you call your tutor 'sir,' when you were at home?"

"Me? Don't make me laugh. I've got a cracked lip."

"I gather you haven't an overwhelming respect for those set in authority over you."

"If you mean my tutors, I should say nix!"

"You use the plural. Had you a tutor before Mr. Broster?"

He laughed.

"Had I? Only about ten million."

"Poor devils!" I said.

"Who's using bad language now?"

The point was well taken. I corrected myself.

"Poor brutes! What happened to them? Did they commit suicide?"

"Oh, they quit. I don't blame them. I'm a pretty tough proposition, and you don't want to forget it."

He reached out for the cigarette-case. I pocketed it.

"You make me tired!" he said.

"The sensation's mutual."

"Do you think you can swell around, stopping me doing things?"

"You've defined my job exactly."

"Guess again! I know all about this joint. The hot-air merchant was telling me about it on the train."

I took the allusion to be to Mr. Arnold Abney, and thought it rather a happy one.

"He's the boss, and nobody but him is allowed to hit the fellows. If you try it, you'll lose your job. And he ain't going to, because dad's paying double fees, and he's scared stiff he'll lose me if there's any trouble."

"You seem to have a grasp of the position."

"Bet your life I have!"

I looked at him as he sprawled in the chair.

"You're a funny kid," I said.

He stiffened, outraged. His little eyes gleamed.

"Say, it looks to me as if you needed making a head shorter. You're a darned sight too fresh. Who do you think you are, anyway?"

"I'm your guardian angel," I replied. "I'm the fellow who's going to take you in hand and make you a little ray of sunshine about the home. I know your type backward. I've been in America, and studied it on its native asphalt. You super-fatted millionaire kids are all the same. If dad doesn't jerk you into the office before you're out of knickerbockers, you just run to seed. You get to think you're the only thing on earth, and you go on thinking it till one day somebody comes along and shows you you're not, and then you get what's coming to you—good and hard!"

He began to speak, but I was on my favorite theme, one I had studied and brooded upon since the evening when I had received a certain letter at my club.

"I knew a man," I said, "who started out just like you. He always had all the money he wanted; never worked; grew to think himself a sort of young prince. What happened?"

He yawned.

"I'm afraid I'm boring you," I said.

"Go on. Enjoy yourself," said the Little Nugget.

"Well, it's a long story, so I'll spare you it. But the moral of it is that a boy who is going to have money needs to be taken in hand and taught sense while he's young."

He stretched himself.

"You talk a lot. What do you reckon you're going to do?"

I eyed him thoughtfully.

"Well, everything's got to have a beginning," I said. "What you seem to me to want most is exercise. I'll take you for a

run every day. You won't know yourself at the end of a week."

"Say, if you think you're going to get me to run—"

"When I grab your little hand, and start running, you'll find you'll soon be running, too. And, years hence, when you win the Marathon at the Olympic games, you'll come to me with tears in your eyes, and you'll say—"

"Oh, slush!"

"I shouldn't wonder." I looked at my watch. "Meanwhile, you had better go to bed. It's past your proper time."

The Little Nugget stared at me in open-eyed amazement.

"Bed?"

"Bed."

He seemed more amused than annoyed.

"Say, what time do you think I usually go to bed?"

"I know what time you go here—nine o'clock."

As if to support my words, the door opened at that moment, and Mrs. Attwell, the matron, entered.

"I think it's time he came to bed, Mr. Burns."

"Just what I was saying, Mrs. Attwell."

"You're crazy," observed the Little Nugget. "Bed nothing!"

Mrs. Attwell looked at me despairingly.

"I never saw such a boy!"

The whole machinery of the school was being held up by this legal infant. Any vacillation now, and authority would suffer a set-back from which it would be hard put to it to recover. It seemed to me a situation that called for action.

I bent down, scooped the Little Nugget out of his chair like an oyster, and made for the door.

Outside, he screamed incessantly. He kicked me in the stomach, and then on the knee. He continued to scream. He screamed all the way up-stairs. He was screaming when we reached his room.

Half an hour later I sat in the study, smoking thoughtfully. Reports from the seat of war told of a sullen and probably only temporary acquiescence with fate on the part of the enemy. He was in bed, and seemed to have made up his mind to submit to the position. An air of restrained jubilation prevailed among the elder members of the establishment. Mr. Abney was friendly, and Mrs. Attwell openly con-

gratulatory. I was something like the hero of the hour.

But was I jubilant? No. I was inclined to moodiness. Unforeseen difficulties had arisen in my path. Till now I had regarded this kidnaping as something abstract. Personality had not entered into the matter. If I had had any picture in my mind's eye, it was of myself stealing away softly into the night with a docile child, his little hand laid trustfully in mine. From what I had seen and heard of Ogden Ford in moments of emotion, it seemed to me that whoever wanted to kidnap him with any approach to stealth would need to use chloroform.

Things were getting very complex.

VIII

I HAVE never kept a diary, and I have found it, in consequence, somewhat difficult, in telling this narrative, to arrange the minor incidents of my story in their proper sequence. I am writing by the light of an imperfect memory; and the work is complicated by the fact that the early days of my sojourn at Sanstead House are a blur, a confused welter like a futurist picture, from which emerge haphazard the figures of boys—boys working, boys eating, boys playing football, boys whispering, shouting, asking questions, banging doors, jumping on beds, and clattering up-stairs and along passages. The whole picture is faintly scented with a composite aroma consisting of roast beef, ink, chalk, and that curious class-room smell which is like nothing else on earth.

I cannot arrange the incidents. I can see Mr. Abney, furrowed as to the brow and drooping at the jaw, trying to separate Ogden Ford from a half-smoked cigar-stump. I can hear Glossop, feverishly angry, bellowing at an amused class. A dozen other pictures come back to me, but I cannot place them in their order; and perhaps, after all, their sequence is unimportant. This story deals with affairs which were outside the ordinary school life.

With the war between the Little Nugget and authority, for instance, the narrative has little to do. It is a subject for an epic, but it lies apart from the main channel of the story, and must be avoided. To tell of his gradual taming, of the chaos his advent caused until we became able to cope with him, would be to turn this story into a treatise on education. It is enough to say

that the process of molding his character and exorcising the devil which seemed to possess him was slow.

It was Ogden who introduced tobacco-chewing into the school, with fearful effects, one Saturday night, on the aristocratic interiors of Lord Windhall and the Hon. Edwin Bellamy. It was the ingenious gambling game imported by Ogden which was rapidly undermining the moral sense of twenty-four innocent English boys when it was pounced upon by Glossop. It was Ogden who, on the one occasion when Mr. Abney reluctantly resorted to the cane and administered four mild taps with it, relieved his outraged feelings by going up-stairs and breaking all the windows in all the bedrooms.

We had some difficult young charges at Sanstead House. Mr. Abney's policy of benevolent toleration insured that; but Ogden Ford stood alone.

I have said that it is difficult for me to place the lesser events of my narrative in their proper order. I except three, however, which I will call the affair of the strange American, the adventure of the sprinting butler, and the episode of the genial visitor.

I will describe them singly, as they happened.

It was the custom at Sanstead House for each of the assistant masters to take half of one day in every week as a holiday. It was little enough, and in most schools, I believe, the allowance is more liberal; but Mr. Abney was a man with peculiar views on other people's holidays, and Glossop and I were accordingly restricted.

My day was Wednesday; and on the Wednesday of which I write I strolled toward the village. I had in my mind a game of billiards at the local inn. Sanstead House and its neighborhood were lacking in the fiercer metropolitan excitements, and billiards at the Feathers constituted, for the pleasure-seeker, the beginning and end of the gay whirl.

There was a local etiquette governing the game of billiards at the Feathers. You played the marker a hundred up, then you took him into the bar-parlor and bought him refreshment. He raised his glass, said "To you, sir," and drained it at a gulp. After that you could, if you wished, play another game, or go home, as your fancy dictated.

There was only one other occupant of the bar-parlor when we adjourned thither, and a glance at him told me that he was not ostentatiously sober. He was lying back in a chair, with his feet on the side-table, and crooning slowly, in a melancholy voice, the following words:

I don't care—if he wears—a crown,
He can't—keep kicking my—dawg aroun'!

He was a tough, clean-shaven man, with a broken nose, over which was tilted a soft felt hat. His wiry limbs were clad in what I put down as a mail-order suit. I could have placed him by his appearance, if I had not already done so by his voice, as an East Side New Yorker. What an East Side New Yorker could be doing in Sanstead, it was beyond me to explain.

We had hardly seated ourselves when he rose and lurched out. I saw him pass the window, and his assertion that no crowned head should molest his dog came faintly to my ears as he went down the street.

"American!" said Miss Benjafield, the stately barmaid, with strong disapproval. "They're all alike."

I never contradict Miss Benjafield—one would as soon contradict the Statue of Liberty—so I merely breathed sympathetically.

"What he's here for I'd like to know," she continued.

It occurred to me that I also should like to know. In thirty hours I was to find out.

I shall lay myself open to a charge of denseness such as even *Dr. Watson* would have scorned when I say that, though I thought of the matter a good deal on my way back to the school, I did not arrive at the obvious solution. No doubt much teaching and taking of duty had dulled my wits, and the presence of the Little Nugget at Sanstead House did not even occur to me as a reason why strange Americans should be prowling in the village.

We now come to the remarkable activity of White, the butler. It happened that same evening.

It was not late when I started on my way back to the house, but the short January day was over and it was very dark as I turned in at the big gate of the school and made my way up the drive. The drive at Sanstead House was a fine, curving stretch of gravel, about two hundred yards in length, flanked on either side by fir-trees

and rhododendrons. I stepped out briskly, for it had begun to freeze. Just as I caught sight through the trees of the lights of the windows, there came to me the sound of running feet.

I stopped. The noise grew louder. There seemed to be two runners, one moving with short, quick steps, the other, the one in front, taking a longer stride.

I drew aside instinctively. In another moment, making a great clatter on the frozen gravel, the first of the pair passed me; and as he did so, there was a sharp crack, and something sang through the darkness like a large mosquito.

The effect of the sound on the man who had been running was immediate. He stopped in his stride and dived into the bushes. His footsteps thudded faintly on the turf.

The whole incident had lasted only a few seconds, and I was still standing there, when I was aware of the other man approaching. He had apparently given up the pursuit, for he was walking quite slowly. He stopped within a few feet of me, and I heard him swearing softly to himself.

"Who's that?" I cried sharply.

The crack of the pistol had given a flick to my nerves. Mine had been a sheltered life, into which revolver-shots had not hitherto entered, and I was resenting this abrupt introduction of them. I felt jumpy and irritated.

It gave me a malicious pleasure to see that I had startled the unknown dispenser of shocks quite as much as he had startled me. The movement he made as he faced toward my direction was almost a leap; and it suddenly flashed upon me that I had better at once establish my identity as a non-combatant.

I appeared to have wandered inadvertently into the midst of a private quarrel, one party to which—the one standing a couple of yards from me, with a loaded revolver in his hand—was evidently a man of impulse, the sort of man who would shoot first and inquire afterward.

"I'm Mr. Burns," I said. "I'm one of the assistant masters. Who are you?"

"Mr. Burns!"

Surely that rich voice was familiar.

"White?" I said.

"Yes, sir."

"What on earth do you think you're doing? Have you gone mad? Who was that man?"

"I wish I could tell you, sir. A very doubtful character. I found him prowling at the back of the house, very suspicious. He took to his heels, and I followed him."

"But"—I spoke querulously, for my orderly nature was shocked—"you can't go shooting at people like that just because you find them at the back of the house. He might have been a tradesman."

"I think not, sir."

"Well, so do I, if it comes to that. He didn't behave like one. But, all the same—"

"I take your point, sir; but I was merely intending to frighten him."

"You succeeded all right. He went through those bushes like a cannon-ball."

I heard him chuckle.

"I think I may have scared him a little, sir," he said.

"We must phone to the police-station. Could you describe the man?"

"I think not, sir. It was very dark. And, if I may make the suggestion, it would be better not to inform the police. I have a very poor opinion of these country constables."

"But we can't have men prowling—"

"If you will permit me, sir, I say let them prowl. It's the only way to catch them."

"If you think this sort of thing is likely to happen again, I must tell Mr. Abney."

"Pardon me, sir, I think it would be better not. He impresses me as a somewhat nervous gentleman, and it would only disturb him."

At this moment it suddenly struck me that, in my interest in the mysterious fugitive, I had omitted to notice what was really the most remarkable point in the whole affair. How did White happen to have a revolver at all? I have met many butlers who behaved unexpectedly in their spare time. One I knew played the fiddle; another preached socialism in Hyde Park; but I had never yet come across a butler who fired pistols.

"What were you doing with a revolver?" I asked.

He hesitated.

"May I ask you to keep it to yourself, sir, if I tell you something?" he said at last.

"What do you mean?"

"I'm a detective."

"What!"

"A Pinkerton man, Mr. Burns."

I felt like one who sees a danger sign over thin ice. But for this information, who knew what rash move I might not have made, under the assumption that the Little Nugget was unguarded? At the same time I could not help reflecting that, if things had been complex before, they had become far more so in the light of this discovery. To spirit Ogden away had never struck me, since his arrival at the school, as an easy task. It seemed more difficult now than ever.

I had the sense to affect astonishment. I made my imitation of an innocent assistant master astounded by the news that the butler is a detective in disguise as realistic as I could. It appeared to be satisfactory, for he began to explain.

"I am employed by Mr. Elmer Ford to guard his son. There are several parties after that boy, Mr. Burns. Naturally he is a considerable prize. Mr. Ford would pay a large sum to get back his only son if he were kidnaped. So it stands to reason he takes precautions."

"Does Mr. Abney know what you are?"

"No, sir. Mr. Abney thinks I am an ordinary butler. You are the only person who knows, and I have only told you because you happened to catch me in a rather queer position for a butler to be in. You will keep it to yourself, sir? It doesn't do for it to get about. These things have to be done quietly. It would be bad for the school if my presence here were advertised. The other parents wouldn't like it. They would think that their sons were in danger, you see. It would be disturbing for them. So if you will just forget what I've been telling you, Mr. Burns—"

I assured him that I would; but I was very far from meaning it. If there was one thing which I intended to bear in mind, it was the fact that other watchful eyes besides mine were upon the Little Nugget.

The third and last of this chain of occurrences, the episode of the genial visitor, took place on the following day, and may be passed over briefly.

All that happened was that a well-dressed man, who gave his name as Arthur Gordon, of Philadelphia, dropped in unexpectedly to inspect the school. He apologized for not having written to make an appointment, but explained that he was leaving England almost immediately. He was looking for a school for his sister's

son, and, happening to meet his business acquaintance, Mr. Elmer Ford, in London, he had been recommended to Mr. Abney.

He made himself exceedingly pleasant. He was a breezy, genial man, who joked with Mr. Abney, chaffed the boys, prodded the Little Nugget in the ribs, to that overfed youth's discomfort; made a rollicking tour of the house, in the course of which he inspected Ogden's bedroom—in order, he told Mr. Abney, to be able to report conscientiously to his friend Ford that the son and heir was not being pampered too much, and departed in a whirl of good humor, leaving every one enthusiastic over his charming personality. His last words were that everything was thoroughly satisfactory, and that he had learned all he wanted to know.

Which, as was proved that same night, was the simple truth.

IX

I OWED it to my colleague Glossop that I was in the center of the surprising things that occurred that night. By sheer weight of boredom Glossop drove me from the house, so that it came about that, at half past nine, the time at which the affair began, I was patrolling the gravel in front of the porch.

It was the practise of the staff of Sandstead House School to assemble after dinner in Mr. Abney's study for coffee. The room was called the study, but it was really more of a masters' common room. Mr. Abney had a smaller sanctum of his own, reserved exclusively for himself.

On this particular night he went there early, leaving me alone with Glossop.

It is one of the drawbacks of the desert-island atmosphere of a private school that everybody is always meeting everybody else. To avoid a man for long is impossible. I had been avoiding Glossop as long as I could, for I knew that he wanted to corner me with a view to a heart-to-heart talk on life insurance.

These amateur life-insurance agents are a curious band. The world is full of them. I have met them at country houses, at seaside hotels, on ships, everywhere; and it has always amazed me that they should find the game worth the candle. What they add to their incomes I do not know, but it cannot be very much, and the trouble they have to take is colossal. Nobody loves them, and they must see it; yet they

persevere. Glossop, for instance, had been trying to buttonhole me every time there was a five-minutes' break in the day's work.

He had his chance now, and he did not mean to waste it. Mr. Abney had scarcely left the room when he began to exude pamphlets and booklets at every pocket.

I eyed him sourly as he droned on about "reactionable endowment," "surrender value," and "interest accumulating on the tontine policy." I tried, as I did so, to analyze the loathing I felt for him. I came to the conclusion that it was partly due to his pose of doing the whole thing from purely altruistic motives, entirely for my good, and partly because he forced me to face the fact that I was not always going to be young.

In an abstract fashion I had already realized that I should in time cease to be thirty, but the way in which Glossop spoke of my sixty-fifth birthday made me feel as if it was due to-morrow. He was a man with a manner suggestive of a funeral mute suffering from suppressed jaundice, and I had never before been so weighed down with a sense of the inevitability of decay and the remorseless passage of time. I could feel my hair whitening.

A need for solitude became imperative; and, murmuring something about thinking it over, I escaped from the room.

Except for my bedroom, whither he was quite capable of following me, I had no refuge but the grounds. I unbolted the front door and went out.

It was still freezing, and, though the stars shone, the trees grew so closely about the house that it was too dark for me to see more than a few feet in front of me.

I began to stroll up and down. The night was wonderfully still. I could hear somebody walking up the drive—one of the maids, I supposed, returning from her evening out. I could even hear a bird rustling in the ivy on the wall of the stables.

I fell into a train of thought. I think my mind must still have been under Glossop's gloom-breeding spell, for I was filled with a sense of the infinite pathos of life. What was the good of it all? Why was a man given chances of happiness without the sense to realize and use them? If nature had made me so self-satisfied that I had lost Audrey because of my self-satisfaction, why had she not made me so self-

satisfied that I could lose her without a pang?

Audrey! It annoyed me that, whenever I was free for a moment from active work, my thoughts should keep turning to her. It frightened me, too. Engaged to Cynthia, I had no right to have such thoughts.

Perhaps it was the mystery which hung about her that kept her in my mind. I did not know where she was. I did not know how she had fared. I did not know what sort of a man it was whom she had preferred to me.

That, it struck me, was the crux of the matter. She had vanished absolutely with another man, whom I had never seen and whose very name I did not know. I had been beaten by an unseen foe.

I was deep in a very slough of despond, when suddenly things began to happen. I might have known that Sanstead House would not permit solitary brooding on life for very long. It was a place of incident, not of abstract speculation.

I had reached the end of my "beat," and had stopped to relight my pipe, when drama broke loose with the swift unexpectedness that was characteristic of the place. The stillness of the night was split by a sound which I could have heard in a gale and recognized among a hundred conflicting noises. It was a scream—a shrill, piercing squeal that did not rise to a crescendo, but started at its maximum and held the note; a squeal which could proceed from only one throat; the deafening war-cry of the Little Nugget!

I had grown accustomed, since my arrival at Sanstead House, to a certain quickening of the pace of life, but to-night events succeeded one another with a rapidity which surprised me. A whole cinematograph drama was enacted during the space of time it takes for a wooden match to burn.

At the moment when the Little Nugget gave tongue I had just struck one, and I stood, startled into rigidity, holding it in the air, as if I had decided to constitute myself a sort of lime-light man to the performance.

It cannot have been more than a few seconds later when some unknown person nearly destroyed me.

I was standing, holding my match and listening to the sounds of confusion indoors, when this person, rounding the angle of the house in a desperate hurry, sudden-

ly emerged from the bushes and rammed me squarely.

He was a short man, or he must have crouched as he ran, for his shoulder—a hard, bony shoulder—was precisely the same distance from the ground as my solar plexus. In the brief collision which ensued between the two, the shoulder had the advantage of being in motion, while the solar plexus was stationary, and there was no room for any shadow of doubt as to which had the worst of it.

That the mysterious unknown was not unshaken by the encounter was made clear by a sharp yelp of surprise and pain. He staggered. What happened to him after that, however, was not a matter of interest to me. I gather that he escaped into the night; but I was too occupied with my own affairs to follow his movements.

Of all cures for melancholy introspection a violent blow in the solar plexus is the most immediate. If Mr. Corbett had any abstract worries that day at Carson City, I fancy they ceased to occupy his mind from the moment when Mr. Fitzsimmons administered that historic left jab. In my case the cure was instantaneous. I can remember reeling across the gravel, falling in a heap, trying to breathe, and knowing that I should never again be able to, and then for some minutes all interest in the affairs of this world left me.

How long it was before my breath returned, hesitatingly, like some timid prodigal son trying to muster up courage to enter the old home, I do not know; but it cannot have been many minutes, for the house was only just beginning to disgorge its occupants as I sat up. Disconnected cries and questions filled the air. Dim forms moved about in the darkness.

I had started to struggle to my feet, feeling very sick and boneless, when it was borne in upon me that the sensations of this remarkable night were not yet over. As I reached a sitting position, and paused before adventuring further, to allow a wave of nausea to pass, a hand was placed on my shoulder and a voice behind me said:

"Don't move!"

I was not in a condition to argue. Beyond a fleeting feeling that a liberty was being taken with me, and that I was being treated unjustly, I do not remember resenting the command. I had no notion who the speaker might be, and no curiosity in regard to him.

Breathing just then had all the glamour of a difficult feat cleverly performed. I concentrated my whole attention upon it. I was pleased and surprised to find myself getting on so well. I remember having much the same sensation when I first learned to ride a bicycle—a kind of dazed feeling that I seemed to be doing it, but goodness knew how.

A minute or so later, when I had leisure to observe outside matters, I perceived that among the other actors in the drama confusion still reigned. There was much scuttering about, and much meaningless shouting. Mr. Abney's reedy tenor voice was issuing directions, each of which reached a dizzier height of futility than the last. Glossop was repeating over and over again the words, "Shall I telephone for the police?"—to which nobody appeared to pay the least attention. One or two boys were darting about like rabbits and squealing unintelligibly. A female voice—I think it was Mrs. Attwell's—was saying:

"Can you see him?"

Up to this point my match, long since extinguished, had been the only illumination the affair had received; but now somebody, who proved to be White, the butler, came from the direction of the stable-yard with a carriage-lamp. Every one seemed calmer and happier for it. The boys stopped squealing, Mrs. Attwell and Glossop subsided, and Mr. Abney said "Ah!" in a self-satisfied voice, as if he had directed this move and was congratulating himself on the success with which it had been carried out.

The whole strength of the company gathered round the light.

"Thank you, White," said Mr. Abney. "Excellent! I fear the scoundrel has escaped."

"I suspect so, sir."

"This is a very remarkable occurrence, White."

"Yes, sir."

"The man was actually in Master Ford's bedroom."

"Indeed, sir?"

A shrill voice spoke. I recognized it as that of Augustus Beckford, always to be counted upon to be in the center of things, gathering information.

"Sir, please, sir, what was up? Who was it, sir? Sir, was it a burglar, sir? Have you ever met a burglar, sir? My

father took me to see 'Raffles' in the holidays, sir. Do you think this chap was like Raffles, sir? Sir—"

"It was undoubtedly—" Mr. Abney was beginning, when the identity of the questioner dawned upon him, and for the first time he realized that the drive was full of boys actively engaged in catching their deaths of cold. His all-friends-here-let-us-discuss-this-interesting-episode-fully manner changed. He became the outraged schoolmaster. Never before had I heard him speak so sharply to boys, many of whom, though breaking rules, were still titled.

"What are you boys doing out of bed? Go back to bed instantly. I shall punish you most severely. I—"

"Shall I telephone for the police?" asked Glossop.

Disregarded.

"I will not have this conduct. You will catch cold. This is disgraceful. Ten bad marks! I shall punish you most severely if you do not instantly—"

A calm voice interrupted him.

"Say!"

The Little Nugget strolled easily into the circle of light. He was wearing a dressing-gown, and in his hand was a smoldering cigarette, from which he proceeded, before continuing his remarks, to blow a cloud of smoke.

"Say, I guess you're wrong. That wasn't any ordinary porch-climber."

The spectacle of his *bête noir* wreathed in smoke, coming on top of the emotions of the night, was almost too much for Mr. Abney. He gesticulated for a moment in impassioned silence, his arms throwing grotesque shadows on the gravel.

"How dare you smoke, boy? How dare you smoke that cigarette?"

"It's the only one I've got," responded the Little Nugget amiably.

"I have spoken to you—I have warned you—ten bad marks! I will not have—fifteen bad marks!"

The Little Nugget ignored the painful scene. He was smiling quietly.

"If you ask me," he said, "that guy was after something better than plated spoons. Yes, sir! If you want my opinion, it was Buck MacGinnis, or Chicago Ed, or one of those guys, and what he was trailing was me. They're always at it. Buck had a try for me in the fall of 1907, and Ed—"

"Do you hear me? Will you return instantly?"

"If you don't believe me, I can show you the piece there was about it in the papers. I've got a press-clipping album in my box. Whenever there's a piece about me in the papers, I cut it out and paste it in my album. If you'll come right along I'll show you the story about Buck now. It happened in Chicago, and he'd have got away with me if it hadn't been—"

"Twenty bad marks!"

"Mr. Abney!"

It was the person standing behind me who spoke. Till now he or she had remained a silent spectator, waiting, I suppose, for a lull in the conversation.

They jumped, all together, like a well-trained chorus.

"Who is that?" cried Mr. Abney. I could tell by the sound of his voice that his nerves were on wires. "Who was that who spoke?"

"Shall I telephone for the police?" asked Glossop.

Ignored.

"I am Mrs. Sheridan, Mr. Abney. You were expecting me to-night."

"Mrs. Sheridan? Mrs. Sher— I expected you in a cab. I expected you in—ah—in fact, a cab."

"I walked."

I had a curious sensation of having heard the voice before. When she had told me not to move she had spoken in a whisper—or, to me, in my dazed state, it had sounded like a whisper; but now she was raising her voice, and there was a note in it that seemed familiar. It stirred some chord in my memory, and I waited to hear it again.

When it came it brought the same sensation, but nothing more definite. It left me groping for the clue.

"Here is one of the men, Mr. Abney."

There was a profound sensation. Boys who had ceased to squeal squealed with fresh vigor. Glossop made his suggestion about the telephone with a new ring of hope in his voice. Mrs. Attwell shrieked. They made for us in a body, boys and all, White leading with the lantern. I was almost sorry for being compelled to provide an anticlimax.

Augustus Beckford was the first to recognize me, and I expect he was about to ask me if I liked sitting on the gravel on a frosty night, or what gravel was made of, when Mr. Abney spoke.

"Mr. Burns! What—dear me!—*what* are you doing there?"

"Perhaps Mr. Burns can give us some information as to where the man went, sir," suggested White.

"On everything except that," I said, "I'm a mine of information. I haven't the least idea where he went. All I know about him is that he has a shoulder like the ram of a battle-ship, and that he charged me with it."

As I was speaking I thought I heard a little gasp behind me. I turned. I wanted to see this woman who stirred my memory with her voice; but the rays of the lantern did not fall on her, and she was a shapeless blur in the darkness. Somehow, I felt that she was looking intently at me.

I resumed my narrative.

"I was lighting my pipe when I heard a scream—"

A chuckle came from the group behind the lantern.

"I screamed," said the Little Nugget. "You bet I screamed! What would *you* do if you woke up in the dark and found a strong-armed rough-neck prising you out of bed as if you were a clam? He tried to get his hand over my mouth, but he only connected with my forehead, and I'd got going before he could switch. I guess I threw a scare into that gink!"

He chuckled again, reminiscently, and drew at his cigarette.

"How dare you smoke? Throw away that cigarette!" cried Mr. Abney, roused afresh by the red glow.

"Forget it!" advised the Little Nugget tersely.

"And then," I said, "somebody whizzed out from nowhere and hit me. And after that I didn't seem to care much about him or anything else." I spoke in the direction of my captor. She was still standing outside the circle of light. "I expect you can tell us what happened, Mrs. Sheridan."

I did not think that her information was likely to be of any practical use, but I wanted to make her speak again.

Her first words were enough. I wondered how I could ever have been in doubt. I knew the voice now. It was one which I had not heard for five years, but one which I couldn't forget if I lived forever.

"Somebody ran past me." I hardly heard her. My heart was pounding, and a curious dizziness had come over me. I

was grappling with the incredible. "I think he went into the bushes."

I heard Glossop speak, and gathered from Mr. Abney's reply that he had made his suggestion about the telephone once more.

"I think that will be—ah—unnecessary, Mr. Glossop. The man has undoubtedly—ah—made good his escape. I think we had all better return to the house." He turned to the dim figure beside me. "Ah, Mrs. Sheridan, you must be tired after your journey and the—ah—unusual excitement. Mrs. Attwell will show you where you—in fact, your room."

In the general movement White must have raised the lamp or stepped forward, for the rays shifted. The figure beside me was no longer dim, but stood out sharp and clear in the yellow light.

I was aware of two large eyes looking into mine as, in the gray London morning two weeks before, they had looked from a faded photograph.

X

OF all the emotions which kept me awake that night, a vague discomfort and a feeling of resentment against fate, more than against any individual, were the two that remained with me next morning.

Astonishment does not last. The fact of Audrey and myself being under the same roof after all these years had ceased to amaze me. It was a minor point, and my mind shelved it in order to deal with the one thing that really mattered—the fact that she had come back into my life just when I had definitely, as I thought, put her out of it.

My resentment deepened. Fate had played me a wanton trick. Cynthia trusted me. If I were weak I should not be the only one to suffer; and something told me that I should be weak. How could I hope to be strong, tortured by the thousand memories which the sight of her would bring back to me?

But I would fight, I told myself. I would not yield easily. I promised that to my self-respect, and was rewarded with a certain glow of excitement. I felt defiant. I wanted to test myself at once.

My opportunity came after breakfast. She was standing on the gravel in front of the house, almost, in fact, on the spot where we had met the night before. She looked up as she heard my step, and I

saw that her chin had that determined tilt which, in the days of our engagement, I had often noticed without attaching any particular significance to it. Heavens, what a ghastly lump of complacency I must have been in those days! A child, I thought, if he were not wrapped up in the contemplation of his own magnificence, could read its meaning.

It meant war, and I was glad of it. I wanted war!

"Good morning," I said.

"Good morning."

There was a pause. I took the opportunity to collect my thoughts.

I looked at her curiously. Five years had left their mark on her, but entirely for the good. She had an air of quiet strength which I had never noticed in her before. It may have been there in the old days, but I did not think so. It was, I felt certain, a later development. She gave the impression of having been through much and of being sure of herself.

In appearance she had changed amazingly little. She looked as small and slight and trim as ever she had done. She was a little paler, I thought, and the Irish eyes were older and a shade harder; but that was all.

I awoke with a start to the fact that I was staring at her. A slight flush had crept into her pale cheeks.

"Don't!" she said suddenly, with a little gesture of irritation.

The word and the gesture killed, as if they had been a blow, a kind of sentimental tenderness which had been stealing over me.

"What are you doing there?" I asked.

She was silent.

"Please don't think I want to pry into your affairs," I said. "I was only interested in the coincidence that we should meet here like this."

She turned to me impulsively. Her face had lost its hard look.

"Oh, Peter," she said, "I'm sorry. I am sorry!"

It was my chance, and I snatched at it with a lack of chivalry which I regretted almost immediately. But I was feeling bitter, and bitterness makes a man do cheap things.

"Sorry?" I said, politely puzzled. "Why?"

She looked taken aback, as I hoped she would.

"For—for what happened?"

"My dear Audrey, anybody would have made the same mistake. I don't wonder you took me for a burglar."

"I didn't mean that. I meant—five years ago."

I laughed. I was not feeling like laughter at the moment, but I did my best, and had the satisfaction of seeing that it jarred upon her.

"Surely you're not worrying yourself about that!" I said.

I laughed again. Very jovial and debonaire I was that winter morning. The brief moment in which we might have softened toward each other was over. There was a significant glitter in Audrey's blue eyes which told me that it was once more war between us.

"I thought you would get over it," she said.

"Well," I said, "I was only twenty-five. One's heart doesn't break at twenty-five."

"I don't think yours would ever be likely to break, Peter."

"Is that a compliment or otherwise?"

"You would probably think it a compliment. I meant that you were not human enough to be heart-broken."

"So that's your idea of a compliment!"

"I said I thought it was probably yours."

"I must have been a curious sort of man five years ago, if I gave you that impression."

"You were."

She spoke in a meditative voice, as if, across the years, she were idly inspecting some strange species of insect. The attitude annoyed me. I could look, myself, with a detached eye at the man I had once been, but I still retained a sort of affection for him, and I felt piqued.

"I suppose you looked on me as a kind of ogre in those days?" I said.

"I suppose I did."

There was a pause.

"I didn't mean to hurt your feelings," she said.

That was the most galling part of it. Mine was an attitude of studied offensiveness. I did want to hurt her feelings. But hers, it seemed to me, was no pose. She really had had—and, I suppose, still retained—a genuine horror of me. The struggle was unequal.

"You were very kind," she went on, "sometimes—when you happened to think of it."

Considered as the best she could find to say of me, it was not a eulogy.

"Well," I said, "we needn't discuss what I was or did five years ago. Whatever I was or did, you escaped. Let's think of the present. What are we going to do about this?"

"You think the existing situation is embarrassing?"

"I do."

"One of us ought to go, I suppose," she said doubtfully.

"Exactly."

"Well, I can't go."

"Nor can I."

"I have business here."

"Obviously, so have I."

"It's absolutely necessary that I should be here."

"And that I should."

She considered me for a moment.

"Mrs. Attwell told me that you were one of the assistant masters at the school."

"I am acting as assistant master. I am supposed to be learning the business."

She hesitated.

"Why?" she said.

"Why not?"

"But—but—you used to be very well off."

"I'm better off now. I'm working."

She was silent for a moment.

"Of course it's impossible for you to leave. You couldn't, could you?"

"No."

"I can't either."

"Then I suppose we must face the embarrassment."

"But why must it be embarrassing? You said yourself you had—got over it."

"Absolutely. I am engaged to be married."

She gave a little start. She drew a pattern on the gravel with her foot before she spoke.

"I congratulate you," she said at last.

"Thank you."

"I hope you will be very happy."

"I'm sure I shall."

She relapsed into silence. It occurred to me that, having posted her thoroughly in my affairs, I was entitled to ask about hers.

"How in the world did you come to be here?" I said.

"It's rather a long story. After my husband died—"

"Oh!" I exclaimed, startled.

"Yes, he died three years ago."

She spoke in a level voice, with a ring of hardness in it for which I was to learn the true reason later. At the time it seemed due to resentment at having to speak of the man whom she had loved to me, whom she disliked; and my feeling of bitterness increased.

"I have been looking after myself for a long time," she went on.

"In England?"

"In America. We went to New York directly we—directly I had written to you. I have been in America ever since. I only returned to England a few weeks ago."

"But what brought you to Sanstead?"

"Some years ago I got to know Mr. Ford, the father of the little boy who is at the school. He recommended me to Mr. Abney, who wanted somebody to help with the school."

"And you are dependent on your work? I mean—forgive me if I am personal—Mr. Sheridan did not—"

"He left no money at all."

"Who was he?" I burst out.

I felt that the subject of the dead man was one which it was painful for her to talk about, at any rate to me, but the Sheridan mystery had vexed me for five years, and I thirsted to know something of this man who had dynamited my life without ever appearing in it.

"He was an artist—a friend of my father."

I wanted to hear more. I wanted to know what he looked like, how he spoke, how he compared with me in a thousand ways; but it was plain that she would not willingly be communicative about him; and, with a feeling of resentment, I gave her her way, and suppressed my curiosity.

"So your work here is all you have?" I said.

"Absolutely all. And, if it's the same with you, well, here we are!"

"Here we are!" I echoed. "Exactly."

"We must try and make it as easy for each other as we can," she said.

"Of course."

She looked at me in that curious, wide-eyed way of hers.

"You have got thinner, Peter," she said.

"Have I?" I said. "Suffering, I suppose, or exercise."

Her eyes left my face. I saw her bite her lip.

"You hate me," she said abruptly.

"You've been hating me all these years. Well, I don't wonder."

She turned and began to walk slowly away. And, as she did so, a sense of the littleness of the part I was playing came over me. Ever since our talk had begun I had been trying to hurt her, trying to take a petty revenge on her for—what? All that had happened five years ago had been my fault. I could not let her go like this. I felt unutterably mean.

"Audrey," I called.

She stopped; I went to her.

"Audrey," I said, "you're wrong. If there's anybody I hate, it's myself. I just want to tell you that I understand."

Her lips parted, but she did not speak.

"I understand just what made you do it," I went on. "I can see now the sort of man I was in those days."

"You're saying that to—to help me," she said in a low voice.

"No. I have felt like that about it for years."

"I treated you shamefully."

"Nothing of the kind. There's a certain sort of man who badly needs a—jolt, and he had to get it sooner or later. It happened that you gave me mine, but that wasn't your fault. I was bound to get it somehow." I laughed. "Fate was waiting for me round the corner. Fate wanted something to hit me with. You happened to be the nearest thing handy."

"I'm sorry, Peter."

"Nonsense! You knocked some sense into me. That's all you did. Every man needs education. Most men get theirs in small doses, so that they hardly know they are getting it at all. My money kept me from getting mine that way. By the time I met you, there was a great heap of back education due to me, and I got it in a lump. That's all."

"You're generous."

"Nothing of the kind. It's only that I see things clearer than I did. I was a pig in those days."

"You weren't!"

"I was. Well, we won't quarrel about it."

Inside the house the bell rang for breakfast. We turned. As I drew back to let her go in she stopped.

"Peter," she said.

She began to speak quickly.

"Peter, let's be sensible. Why should we let this embarrass us, this being to—"

gether here? Can't we just pretend that we're two old friends who parted through a misunderstanding, and have come together again, with all the misunderstanding cleared away—friends again? Shall we?"

She held out her hand. She was smiling, but her eyes were grave.

"Old friends, Peter?"

"Old friends," I said.

And then we went in to breakfast. On the table beside my plate was lying a letter from Cynthia.

XI

I GIVE the letter in full. It was written from the steam-yacht *Mermaid*, lying in Monaco harbor:

MY DEAR PETER:

Where is Ogden? We have been expecting him every day. Mrs. Ford is worrying herself to death. She keeps asking me if I have any news, and it is very tiresome to have to keep telling her that I have not heard from you. Surely, with the opportunities you must get every day, you can manage to kidnap him. Do be quick! We are relying on you.

In haste,

CYNTHIA.

I read this brief and businesslike communication several times during the day; and after dinner that night, in order to meditate upon it in solitude, I left the house and wandered off in the direction of the village.

I was midway between house and village when I became aware that I was being followed. The night was dark, and the wind moving in the tree-tops emphasized the loneliness of the country road. Both time and place were such as made it peculiarly unpleasant to hear stealthy footsteps on the road behind me.

Uncertainty in such cases is the unnerving thing. I turned sharply and began to walk back on tiptoe in the direction from which I had come.

I had not been mistaken. A moment later a dark figure loomed up out of the darkness, and the exclamation which greeted me as I made my presence known showed that I had taken him by surprise.

There was a momentary pause. I expected the man, whoever he might be, to run, but he held his ground. Indeed, he edged forward.

"Get back!" I said.

I allowed my stick to rasp suggestively on the road before raising it in readiness

for any sudden development. It was as well that he should know it was there. The hint seemed to wound rather than frighten him.

"Aw, cut out the rough stuff, bo," he said reproachfully, in a cautious, husky undertone. "I ain't goin' to start anything."

I had a strong impression that I had heard the man's voice before, but I could not place him.

"What are you following me for?" I demanded. "Who are you?"

"Say, I want a talk wit youse. I took a slant at youse under de lamp-post back dere, an' I seen it was you, so I tagged along. Say, I'm wise to your game, sport!"

I had identified him by this time. Unless there were two men in the neighborhood of Sanstead who hailed from the Bowery, this must be the man I had seen at the Feathers, who had incurred the disapproval of Miss Benjafield.

"I haven't the faintest idea what you mean," I said. "What is my game?"

His voice became reproachful again.

"Ah, gee!" he protested. "Quit yer kiddin'! What was youse rubberin' around de house for last night, if you wasn't trailin' de kid?"

"Was it you who ran into me last night?" I asked.

"Gee! I t'ought it was a tree. I came near takin' de count."

"I did take it. You seemed in a great hurry."

"Gee!" repeated the man simply, and expectorated. "Say," he resumed, "dat's a great kid, dat Nugget! I t'ought it was a Black Hand explosion when he cut loose. But, say, let's don't waste time. We gotter get together about dat kid."

"Certainly, if you wish it. What do you happen to mean?"

"Aw, quit yer kiddin'!" He expectorated again. He seemed to be a man who could express the whole gamut of emotions by this simple means. "I know you, bo!"

"Then you have the advantage of me—though I believe I remember seeing you before. Weren't you at the Feathers one Wednesday evening, singing something about a dog?"

"Sure. Dat was me."

"What do you mean by saying that you know me?"

"Aw, quit yer kiddin', Sam!"

There was, it seemed to me, a reluctantly admiring note in his voice.

"Tell me, who do you think I am?" I asked patiently.

"You can't string me, sport. Smooth Sam Fisher is who you are, bo. I know you!"

I was too surprised to speak. Verily, some have greatness thrust upon them.

"I hain't never seen youse, Sam," he continued, "but I know it's you. And I'll tell youse how I doped it out. To begin with, there ain't but you and your bunch and me and my bunch dat knows de Little Nugget's on dis side at all. Dey sneaked him out of New York mighty slick. I heard that you had come here after him. So when I runs into a guy dat's trailin' de kid down here, well, who's it going to be if it ain't youse? And when dat guy talks like a dude, like they all say you do, well, who's it going to be if it ain't youse? So quit yer kiddin', Sam, and let's get down to business."

"Have I the pleasure of addressing Mr. Buck MacGinnis?" I said. I felt convinced that this could be no other than that celebrity.

"Dat's right. Dere's no need to keep up anyt'ing wit me, Sam. We're bote on de same trail, so let's get down to it."

"One moment," I said. "Would it surprise you to hear that my name is Burns, and that I am a master at the school?"

He expectorated admiringly.

"Gee, no!" he said. "It's just what you would be, Sam. I always heard youse had been one of dese rah-rah boys wunst. Say, it's mighty smart of youse to be a perfessor. You're right in on de ground floor." His voice became appealing. "Say, Sam, don't be a hawg! Let's go fifty-fifty in dis deal. My bunch and me has come a number of miles on dis proposition, and dere ain't no need for us to fall to scrappin' over it. Dere's plenty for all of us. Old man Ford 'll cough up enough for every one, and dere won't be any fuss. Let's sit in togedder on dis Nugget t'ing. It ain't like as if it was an ornery two-by-four deal. I wouldn't ask youse if it wasn't big enough for de whole bunch of us."

As I said nothing, he proceeded:

"It ain't square, Sam, to take advantage of your having education. If it was a square fight, and us bote wit de same chance, I wouldn't say; but you bein' a dude perfessor and gettin' right into de

place like dat ain't right. Say, don't be a hawg, Sam. Don't swipe it all. Fifty-fifty! Does dat go?"

"I don't know," I said. "You had better ask the real Sam. Good night!"

I walked past him, and made for the school gates at my best pace. He trotted after me, pleading.

"Sam! Give us a quarter, then."

I walked on.

"Sam, don't be a hawg!"

He broke into a run.

"Sam!" His voice lost its pleading tone and rasped menacingly. "Gee, if I had me canister, youse wouldn't be so flip! Listen here, you big cheese! You t'ink youse is de only t'ing in sight, huh? Well, we ain't done yet. You'll see yet. We'll fix you! Youse had best watch out."

I stopped and turned on him.

"Look here, you fool," I cried, "I tell you I am not Sam Fisher. Can't you understand that you have got hold of the wrong man? My name is Burns—Burns."

He expectorated—scornfully, this time. He was evidently a man slow by nature to receive ideas, but slower to rid himself of one that had contrived to force its way into what he probably called his brain. He had decided on the evidence that I was Smooth Sam Fisher, and no denials on my part were going to shake his belief. He looked on them merely as so many unsportsmanlike quibbles prompted by greed.

"Tell it to Sweeney!" was the form in which he crystallized his skepticism. "Maybe you'll say youse ain't trailin' de Nugget, huh?"

It was a home thrust. If truth-telling has become a habit, one gets slowly off the mark when the moment arrives for the prudent lie. Quite against my will, I hesitated. Observant Mr. MacGinnis perceived my hesitation, and expectorated triumphantly.

"Ah, gee!" he remarked. And then, with a sudden return to ferocity: "All right, you Sam, you wait! We'll fix you, and fix you good! See? Dat goes. You t'ink youse kin put it across us, huh? All right, you'll get yours. You wait!"

And with these words he slid off into the night. From somewhere in the murky middle distance came a scornful "Hawg!" and he was gone, leaving me with a settled conviction that, while I had frequently had occasion, since my expedition to Sanstead began, to describe affairs as complex, their

complexity had now reached its height. With a watchful Pinkerton man within, and a vengeful gang of rivals without, Sanstead House seemed likely to become an unrestful place for a young kidnaper with no previous experience.

The need for swift action had become imperative.

XII

WHITE, the butler, looking singularly unlike a detective—which, I suppose, is how a detective wants to look—was taking the air on the football-field when I left the house next morning for a before-breakfast stroll. The sight of him filled me with a desire for first-hand information on the subject of the man Mr. MacGinnis supposed me to be, and also on that of Mr. MacGinnis himself. I wanted to be assured that my friend Buck, despite appearances, was a placid person whose bark was worse than his bite.

White's manner, at our first conversational exchanges, was entirely that of the butler. From what I came to know of him later, I think he took an artistic pride in throwing himself into whatever rôle he had to assume.

At the mention of Smooth Sam Fisher, however, his manner peeled off him like a skin, and he began to talk as himself, a racy and vigorous self vastly different from the episcopal person he thought it necessary to be when on duty.

"White," I said, "do you know anything of Smooth Sam Fisher?"

He stared at me. I suppose the question, led up to by no previous remarks, was unusual.

"I met a gentleman of the name of Buck MacGinnis—he was our visitor that night, by the way—and he was full of Sam. Do you know him?"

"Buck?"

"Either of them."

"Well, I've never seen Buck, but I've heard a good deal about him. There's pepper to Buck."

"So I should imagine. And Sam?"

"You may take it from me that there's more pepper to Sam's little finger than there is to Buck's whole body. Sam could make Buck look like the last run of shad, if it came to a show-down. Buck's just a common rough-neck. Sam's an educated man. He's got brains."

"So I gathered. Well, I'm glad to hear

you speak so well of him, because that's who I'm supposed to be."

"How's that?"

"Buck MacGinnis insists that I am Smooth Sam Fisher. Nothing I can say will shift him."

White stared. He had very bright, humorous brown eyes. Then he began to laugh.

"Well, what do you know about that?" he exclaimed. "Wouldn't that jar you?"

"It would. I may say it did. He called me a hog for wanting to keep the Little Nugget to myself, and left threatening to fix me. What would you say the verb 'to fix' signified in Mr. MacGinnis's vocabulary?"

White was still engaged in chuckling quietly to himself.

"He's a wonder!" he observed. "Can you beat it? Taking you for Smooth Sam Fisher!"

"He said he had never seen Smooth Sam. Have you?"

"Lord, yes!"

"Does he look like me?"

"Not a bit."

"Do you think he's over here in England just now?"

"Sam? I know he is."

"Then Buck MacGinnis was right?"

"Dead right, as far as Sam being on the trail goes. Sam's after the Nugget to get him this time. He's tried often enough before, but we've been too smart for him. This time he allows he's going to bring it off."

"Then why haven't we seen anything of him? Buck MacGinnis seems to be monopolizing the kidnaping industry in these parts."

"Oh, Sam'll show up when he feels good and ready. You can take it from me that Sam knows what he is doing. Sam's a special pet of mine. I don't give a flip for Buck MacGinnis."

"I wish I had your cheery disposition! To me Buck MacGinnis seems a pretty important citizen. I wonder what he meant by 'fix'!"

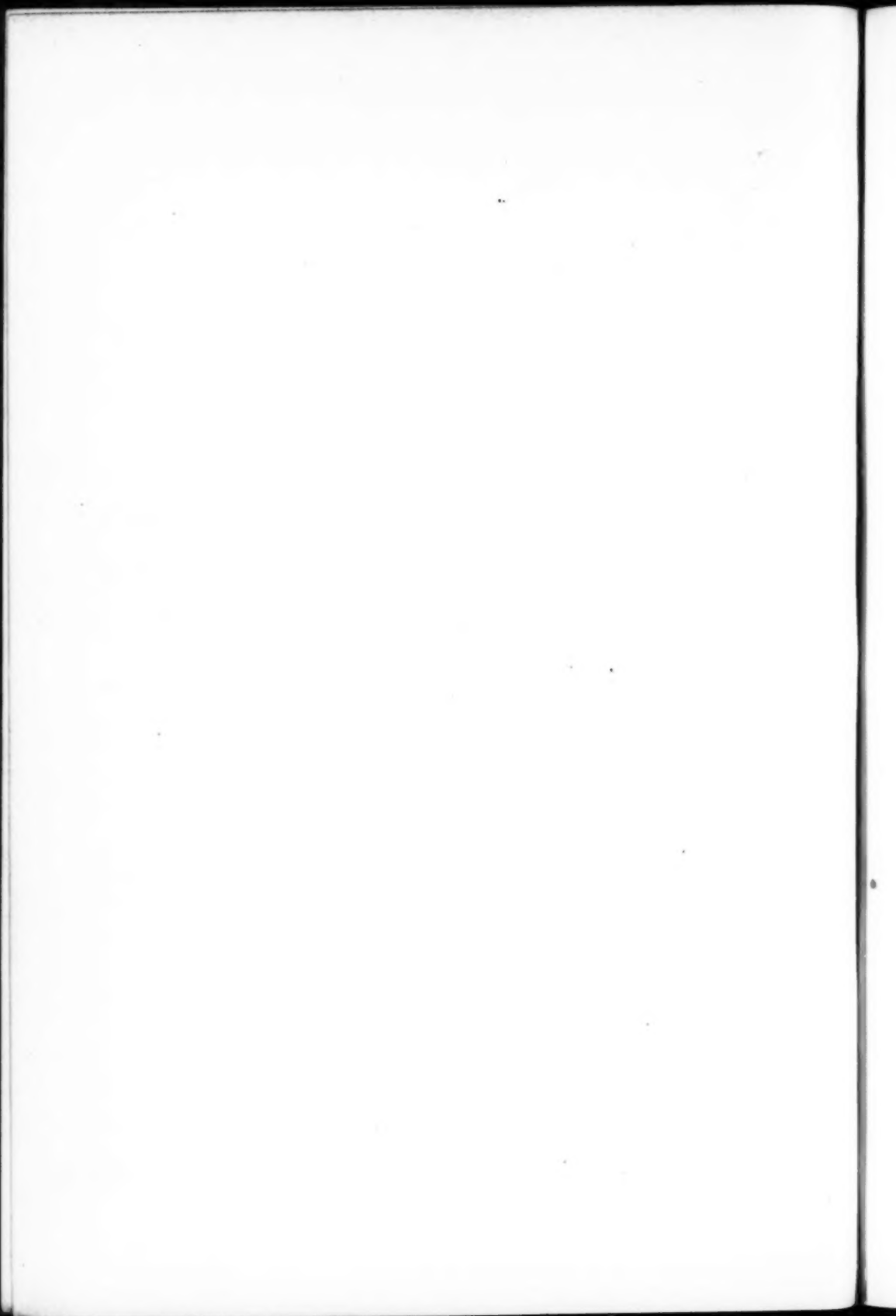
White, however, declined to leave the subject of Buck's more gifted rival.

"Sam's a college man, you know. That gives him a pull. He has brains, and can use them."

"That was one of the points on which Buck reproached me. He said it was not fair to use my superior education."



BUCK URGED ME ON WITH THE MUZZLE OF HIS PISTOL



White laughed.

"Buck's got no sense. That's why you find him carrying on like a porch-climber. It's his only notion of how to behave when he wants to do a job. And that's why there's only one man to keep your eye on in this thing of the Little Nugget, and that's Sam. I wish you could get to know Sam. You'd like him."

"You seem to look on him as a personal friend. I certainly don't like Buck."

"Oh, Buck!" said White scornfully.

We turned toward the house as the sound of the bell came to us across the field.

"Then you think we may count on Sam's arrival, sooner or later, as a certainty?" I said.

"Surest thing you know."

"You will have a busy time"

"All in the day's work."

"I suppose I ought to look at it in that way. But I do wish I knew exactly what Buck meant by 'fix.'"

White at last condescended to give his mind to the trivial point.

"I guess he'll try to put one over on you with the sand-bag," he said carelessly. He seemed to face the prospect with calm.

"A sand-bag, eh?" I said. "It sounds exciting."

"And feels it. I know. I've had some."

I parted from him at the door. As a comforter he had failed to qualify. He had not eased my mind to the slightest extent.

XIII

LOOKING at it now, I can see that the period which followed Audrey's arrival at Sanstead marked the true beginning of our acquaintanceship. Before, during our engagement, we had been strangers, artificially tied together, and she had struggled against the chain. But now, for the first time, we were beginning to know each other, and were discovering that after all we had much in common.

It did not alarm me, this growing feeling of comradeship. Keenly on the alert as I was for the least sign that would show that I was in danger of weakening in my loyalty to Cynthia, I did not detect one in my friendliness for Audrey. On the contrary, I was hugely relieved, for it seemed to me that the danger was past.

I had not imagined it possible that I could ever experience toward her such a

tranquil emotion as this easy friendliness. For the last five years my imagination had been playing round her memory, until I suppose I had built up in my mind some almost superhuman image, some goddess. What I was passing through now, of course, though I was unaware of it, was the natural reaction from that state of mind. Instead of the goddess, I had found a companionable human being. I imagined that I had effected the change myself, and by sheer force of will had brought Audrey into a reasonable relation to the scheme of things.

I suppose a not too intelligent moth has much the same views with regard to the lamp. His last thought, as he enters the flame, is probably one of self-congratulation that he has arranged his dealings with it on such a satisfactory, common-sense basis.

And then, when I was feeling particularly safe and complacent, disaster came.

The day was Wednesday, and my afternoon off, but the rain was driving against the windows, and the attractions of billiards with the marker at the Feathers had not proved sufficient to make me face the two-mile walk in the storm. I had settled myself in the study. There was a noble fire burning in the grate. The darkness lit by the glow of the coals, the dripping of the rain, the good behavior of my pipe, and the reflection that, as I sat there, Glossop was engaged down-stairs in wrestling with my class, combined to steep me in a meditative peace.

Audrey was playing the piano in the drawing-room. The sound came to me faintly through the closed doors. I recognized what she was playing. I wondered if the melody had the same associations for her that it had for me.

The music stopped. I heard the drawing-room door open. She came into the study.

"I didn't know there was any one here," she said. "I'm frozen. The drawing-room fire's out."

"Come and sit down," I said. "You don't mind the smoke?"

I drew a chair up to the fire for her, feeling, as I did so, a certain pride. Here I was, alone with her in the firelight, and my pulse was regular and my brain cool. I had a momentary vision of myself as the strong man, the stern, quiet man with the iron grip on his emotions. I was pleased with myself.

She sat for some minutes, gazing into the fire. Little spurts of flame whistled comfortably in the heart of the black-red coals. Outside, the storm shrieked faintly, and flurries of rain dashed themselves against the window.

"It's very nice in here," she said at last. "Peaceful."

I filled my pipe and relit it. Her eyes, seen for an instant in the light of the match, looked dreamy.

"I've been sitting here listening to you," I said. "I liked that last thing you played."

"You always did."

"You remember that? Do you remember one evening—no, you wouldn't."

"Which evening?"

"Oh, you wouldn't remember. It's only one particular evening when you played that thing. It sticks in my mind. It was at your father's studio."

She looked up quickly.

"We went out afterward and sat in the park."

I sat up, thrilled.

"A man came by with a dog," I said.

"Two dogs."

"One, surely?"

"Two—a bulldog and a fox-terrier."

"I remember the bulldog, but—by Jove, you're right! A fox-terrier with a black patch over his left eye."

"Right eye."

"Right eye. They came up to us, and you—"

"Gave them chocolates."

I sank back slowly in my chair.

"Audrey, you have a wonderful memory," I said.

She bent over the fire without speaking. The rain rattled on the window.

"So you still like my playing, Peter?"

"I like it better than ever. There's something in it now that I don't believe there used to be. I can't describe it—something—"

"I think it's knowledge, Peter," she said quietly. "Experience. I'm five years older than I was when I used to play to you before, and I've seen a good deal of life in those five years. It may not be altogether pleasant seeing life, but—well, I think it makes one play the piano better. Experience goes in at the heart and comes out again at the finger-tips."

It seemed to me that she spoke a little bitterly.

"Have you had a bad time, Audrey, these last years?" I said.

"Pretty bad."

"I'm sorry."

"I'm not—altogether. I've learned a whole lot."

She was silent again, her eyes fixed on the fire.

"What are you thinking about?" I said.

"Oh, a great many things."

"Pleasant?"

"Mixed. The last thing I thought about was pleasant. That was, that I am very lucky to be doing the work I am doing now. Compared with some of the things I have done—"

She shivered.

"I wish you would tell me about those years, Audrey," I said. "What were some of the things you did?"

She leaned back in her chair and shaded her face from the fire with a newspaper. Her eyes were in the shadow.

"Well, let me see. I was a nurse for some time at the Lafayette Hospital in New York."

"That's hard work?"

"Horribly hard. I had to give it up after a while. But—it teaches you. You learn—all sorts of things. Realities. How much of your own trouble is imagination. You get real trouble in a hospital. You get it thrown at you."

I said nothing. I was feeling—I don't know why—a little uncomfortable, a little at a disadvantage, as one feels in the presence of some one bigger than oneself.

"Then I was a waitress."

"A waitress!"

"I tell you I did everything. I was a waitress, and a very bad one. I broke plates. I muddled orders. Finally, I was rude to a customer, and I had to try something else. I forget what came next. I think it was the stage. I traveled for a year with a touring company. That was hard work, too, but I liked it. After that came dressmaking, which was harder, and which I hated. And then I had my first stroke of real luck."

"What was that?"

"I met Mr. Ford."

"How did that happen?"

"You wouldn't remember a Miss Vanderley, an American girl who was over in London five or six years ago? My father taught her painting. She was very rich, but she was wild at that time to be Bo-

hemian. I think that's why she chose father as a teacher. Well, she was always at the studio, and we became great friends, and one day, after all these things I have been telling you of, I thought I would write to her, and see if she could find me something to do. She was a dear!" Audrey's voice trembled, and she lowered the newspaper till her whole face was hidden. "She wanted me to come to their home and live on her forever, but I couldn't have that. I told her I must work. So she sent me to Mr. Ford, whom the Vanderleys knew very well, and I became Ogden's governess."

"Great Scott!" I cried. "What?"

She laughed rather shakily.

"I don't think I was a very good governess. I knew next to nothing. I ought to have had a governess myself. But I managed somehow."

"But Ogden?" I said. "That little fiend; didn't he worry the life out of you?"

"Oh, I had luck there again. He happened to take a mild liking to me, and he was as good as gold—for him; that's to say, if I didn't interfere with him too much, and I didn't. I was horribly weak, and he let me alone. It was the happiest time I had had for ages."

"And when he came here, you came too, as a sort of ex-governess, to continue exerting your moral influence over him?"

She laughed.

"More or less that." We sat in silence for a while, and then she put into words the thought which was in both our minds. "How odd it seems, you and I sitting together chatting like this, Peter, after all— all these years!"

"Like a dream!"

"Just like a dream. I'm so glad! You don't know how I've hated myself sometimes for—"

"Audrey! You mustn't talk like that. Don't let's think of it. Besides, it was my fault." She shook her head. "Well, put it that we didn't understand each other."

She nodded slowly.

"No, we didn't understand each other."

"But we do now," I said. "We're friends, Audrey."

She did not answer. For a long time we sat in silence. And then—the newspaper must have moved—a gleam from the fire fell upon her face, lighting up her eyes; and at the sight something in me began to throb, like a drum warning a city against

danger. The next moment the shadow had covered them again.

I sat there, tense, gripping the arms of my chair. I was tingling. Something was happening to me. I had a curious sensation of being on the threshold of something wonderful and perilous.

From down-stairs there came the sound of boys' voices. Work was over, and with it this talk by the firelight. In a few minutes somebody, Glossop or Mr. Abney, would be breaking in on our retreat.

We both rose, and then—it happened. She must have tripped in the darkness. She stumbled forward; her hand caught at my coat, and she was in my arms.

It was a thing of an instant. She recovered herself, moved toward the door, and was gone.

But I stood where I was, motionless, aghast at the revelation which had come to me in that brief moment. It was the physical contact, the feel of her, warm and alive, that had shattered forever that flimsy structure of friendship which I had fancied so strong. I had said to love. "Thus far, and no farther," and love had swept over me, the more powerful for being checked.

The time of self-deception was over. I knew myself.

XIV

THAT Buck MacGinnis was not the man to let the grass grow under his feet in a situation like the present one I should have gathered from White's remarks if I had not already done so from personal observation. The world is divided into dreamers and men of action. From what little I had seen of him, I placed Buck MacGinnis in the latter class. Every day I expected him to act, and as each twenty-four hours passed and left me still unfixed, I was agreeably surprised. But I knew the hour would come, and it did.

I looked for frontal attack from Buck, not subtlety; but, when the attack came, it was so excessively frontal that my chief emotion was a sort of paralyzed amazement. It seemed incredible that such events could happen in peaceful England, even in so isolated a spot as Sanstead House.

It had been one of those interminable days which occur only at schools. A school, more than any other institution, is dependent on the weather. Every small boy rises from his bed of a morning charged with a definite quantity of deviltry; and this, if he

is to sleep the sound sleep of health, he has to work off somehow before bedtime. That is why the summer term is the one a master longs for, when the intervals between classes can be spent in the open. There is no pleasanter sight for an assistant master at a private school than that of a number of boys expending their inborn venom harmlessly in the sunshine.

On this particular day, snow had begun to fall early in the morning; and while his pupils would have been only too delighted to go out and roll in it by the hour, they were prevented from doing so by Mr. Abney's strict orders. No schoolmaster enjoys seeing his pupils running risks of catching cold, and just then Mr. Abney was especially definite on the subject.

The saturnalia which had followed Mr. MacGinnis's nocturnal visit to the school had had the effect of giving violent colds to three lords, a baronet, and the younger son of an honorable. In addition to that, Mr. Abney himself, his penetrating tenor changed to a guttural croak, was in his bed looking on the world with watering eyes. His views, therefore, on playing in the snow as an occupation for boys were naturally prejudiced.

The result was that Glossop and I had to try and keep order among a mob of small boys, none of whom had had any chance of working off his superfluous energy. How Glossop fared I can only imagine. Judging by the fact that I, who usually kept fair order without excessive effort, was almost overwhelmed, I should fancy he fared badly. His class-room was on the opposite side of the hall from mine, and at frequent intervals his voice would penetrate my door, raised to a frenzied fortissimo.

Little by little, however, we had won through the day, and the boys had subsided into comparative quiet over their evening preparation, when from outside the front door there sounded the purring of the engine of a large automobile. Presently the door-bell rang.

I did not, as I remember, pay much attention to this at the moment. I supposed that somebody from one of the big houses in the neighborhood had called, or, taking the lateness of the hour into consideration, that a motoring party had come, as they did sometimes—Sanstead House standing some miles from anywhere, in the middle of an intricate system of by-roads—to inquire the way to Portsmouth or London.

If my class had allowed me, I would have ignored the sound; but, for them, it supplied just that break in the monotony of things which they had needed. They welcomed it vociferously. The following dialogue ensued:

A VOICE—"Sir, please, sir, there's a motor outside!"

MYSELF (austerely)—"I know there's a motor outside. Get on with your work."

VARIOUS VOICES—"Sir, have you ever ridden in a motor?" "Sir, my father let me help drive our motor last Easter, sir." "Sir, who do you think it is?"

AN ISOLATED GENIUS (imitating the engine)—"Pr-prr! Pr-prr! Pr-prr!"

I was on the point of distributing bad marks—the schoolmaster's standby—broadcast, when a curious sound checked me. It followed directly upon the opening of the front door. I heard White's footsteps crossing the hall, then the click of the latch, and then—a sound that I could not define.

The closed door of the class-room deadened it, but for all that it was audible. It resembled the thud of a falling body, but I knew it could not be that, for in peaceful England butlers, opening front doors, did not fall with thuds.

My class, eager listeners, found fresh material in the sound for friendly conversation.

"Sir, what was that, sir?"

"Did you hear that, sir?"

"What do you think's happened, sir?"

"Be quiet!" I shouted. "Will you please be—"

There was a quick footstep outside; the door flew open; and on the threshold stood a short, sturdy man in a motoring coat and cap. The upper part of his face was covered by a strip of white linen, with holes for the eyes, and there was a Browning pistol in his hand.

It is my belief that if assistant masters were allowed to wear white masks and carry automatic pistols, keeping order in a school would become child's play. A silence such as no threat of bad marks had ever been able to produce fell instantaneously upon the class-room.

Out of the corner of my eye, as I turned to face our visitor, I could see small boys goggling rapturously at this miraculous realization of all the dreams induced by juvenile adventure fiction. As far as I could ascertain, on subsequent inquiry, not

one of them felt a tremor of fear. It was all too tremendously exciting for that. For their exclusive benefit an illustration from a weekly paper for boys had come to life, and they had no time to waste in being frightened.

As for me, I was dazed. Motor bandits may terrorize France and desperadoes hold up trains in America, but this, as I have already mentioned, was peaceful England. The fact that Buck MacGinnis was at large in the neighborhood did not make the thing any the less incredible. I had looked on my affair with Buck as a thing of the open air and the darkness. I had figured him lying in wait in lonely roads, or possibly lurking about the grounds; but in my most apprehensive moments I had not imagined him calling at the front door and holding me up with a revolver in my own class-room.

And yet it was the simple, even the obvious thing for him to do. Given an automobile, success was certain. Sanstead House stood absolutely alone. There was not even a cottage within half a mile. A train broken down in the middle of the Bad Lands was not more cut off.

Consider, too, the peculiar helplessness of a school in such a case. A school lives on the confidence of parents, a nebulous foundation which the slightest breath can destroy. Everything connected with it must be done with exaggerated discretion. I do not suppose Mr. MacGinnis had thought the thing out in all its bearings, but he could not have made a sounder move if he had been a Napoleon.

Where the owner of an ordinary country house, raided by masked men, can raise the countryside in pursuit, a schoolmaster must do precisely the opposite. From his point of view, the fewer people that know of the affair, the better. Parents are a jumpy race. A man may be the ideal schoolmaster, yet a connection with melodrama will damn him in the eyes of parents. They do not inquire. They are too panic-stricken for that. Golden-haired Willie may be receiving the finest education conceivable; yet, if men with Browning pistols are familiar objects at his shrine of learning, they will remove him.

Fortunately for schoolmasters, it is seldom that such visitors call upon them. Indeed, I imagine Mr. MacGinnis's effort to have been the first of its kind.

I do not, as I say, suppose that Buck,

whose forte was action rather than brain-work, had thought all this out. He had trusted to luck, and luck had stood by him. There would be no raising of the countryside in his case. On the contrary, I could see Mr. Abney becoming one of the busiest persons on record in his endeavor to hush the thing up and prevent it getting into the newspapers.

The man with the pistol spoke. He sighted me—I was standing with my back to the mantelpiece, parallel with the door—made a sharp turn, and raised his weapon.

"Put 'em up, sport!" he said.

It was not the voice of Buck MacGinnis. I put my hands up.

"Say, which of dese is de Nugget?" the intruder inquired.

He half turned his head to the class.

"Which of youse kids is Ogden Ford?"

The class was beyond speech. The silence continued.

"Ogden Ford is not here," I said.

Our visitor had not that simple faith which is so much better than Norman blood. He did not believe me. Without moving his head, he gave a long whistle. Steps sounded outside. Another short, sturdy form entered the room.

"He ain't in de odder room," observed the newcomer. "I been rubberin'!"

This was friend Buck beyond question. I could readily have recognized his voice anywhere.

"Well, dis guy," said the man with the pistol, indicating me, "says he ain't here. What's de answer?"

"Why, it's Sam!" said Buck. "Howdy, Sam? Pleased to see us, huh? We're in on de ground floor, too, dis time, all right, all right!"

His words had a marked effect on his colleague.

"Is dat Sam? Gee, let me blow de head off'n him!" he said with simple fervor; and, advancing a step nearer, he waved his disengaged fist truculently.

In my rôle of Sam I had plainly made myself very unpopular. I have never heard so much emotion packed into a few words.

Buck, to my relief, opposed the motion. I thought this decent of Buck.

"Can it!" he said curtly.

The other canned it. The operation took the form of lowering the fist. The pistol

he kept in position. Mr. MacGinnis resumed the conduct of affairs.

"Now den, Sam," he said, "come across! Where's de Nugget?"

"My name is not Sam," I said. "May I put my hands down?"

"Yep, if you want the top of your blamed head blown off."

Such was not my desire. I therefore kept them up.

"Now den, you Sam," said Mr. MacGinnis again. "we ain't got time to burn. Out wit it. Where's dat Nugget?"

Some reply was obviously required. It was useless to keep protesting that I was not Sam.

"At this time in the evening he is generally working with Mr. Glossop."

"Who's Glossop? Dat dough-faced dub in de room over dere?"

"Exactly. You have described him perfectly."

"Well, he ain't dere. I been rubberin'. Aw, quit yer foolin', Sam—where is he?"

"I couldn't tell you just where he is at the present moment," I said precisely.

"Ah, gee! Let me swat him one!" begged the man with the pistol.

He was a most unlovable person. I could never have made a friend of him.

"Can it, you!" said Mr. MacGinnis.

The other canned it once more, regretfully.

"You got him hidden away somewheres, Sam," said Mr. MacGinnis. "You can't fool me. I'm goin' to go t'roo dis joint wit a fine-tooth comb till I find him."

"By all means," I said. "Don't let me stop you."

"You! You're comin' wit me."

"If you wish it. I shall be delighted."

"An' cut out dat blamed sissy way of talking, you rummy!" bellowed Buck, with a sudden lapse into ferocity. "Spiel like a regular guy! Standin' dere, pullin' dat dude stuff on me! Cut it out!"

"Say, why *mayn't* I hand him one?" demanded the pistol-bearer pathetically. "What's your kick against pushin' his face in, Buck?"

I thought the question in poor taste. Buck ignored it.

"Gimme dat canister," he said, taking the Browning pistol from him. "Now den, Sam, are youse goin' to be good, and come across, or ain't you—which?"

"I'd be delighted to do anything you wished, Mr. MacGinnis," I said, "but—"

"Aw, hire a hall!" said Buck disgustedly. "Step lively, den, an' we'll go t'roo de joint. I t'ought youse 'd have had more sense, Sam, dan to play dis fool game when you know you're beat. You—"

Shooting pains in my shoulders caused me to interrupt him.

"One moment," I said. "I'm going to put my hands down. I'm getting a cramp."

"I'll blow a hole in you if you do!"

"Just as you please; but I'm not armed."

"Lefty," he said to the other man, "feel around to see if he's carryin' anyt'ing."

Lefty advanced, and began to tap me scientifically in the neighborhood of my pockets. He grunted morosely the while. I suppose at this close range the temptation to "hand me one" was almost more than he could bear.

"He ain't got no gun," he announced gloomily.

"Den youse can put 'em down," said Mr. MacGinnis.

"Thanks," I said.

"Lefty, youse stay here and look after dese kids. Get a move on, Sam!"

We left the room, a little procession of two, myself leading, Buck in my immediate rear administering occasional cautionary prods with the faithful "canister."

XV

THE first thing that met my eyes as we entered the hall was the body of a man lying by the front door. The light of the lamp fell on his face, and I saw that it was White. His hands and feet were tied.

As I looked at him he moved, as if straining against his bonds; and I was conscious of a feeling of relief. That sound which had reached me in the class-room, that thud of a falling body, had become, in the light of what had happened later, very sinister. It was good to know that White was still alive. I gathered—correctly, as I discovered subsequently—that in his case the sand-bag had been utilized. He had been struck down and stunned the instant he opened the door.

There was a masked man leaning against the wall by Glossop's class-room. He was short and sturdy. The Buck MacGinnis gang seemed to have been turned out on a pattern. Externally, they might all have been twins. This man, to give him a semblance of individuality, had a ragged red mustache. He was smoking a cigar with the air of the warrior taking his rest.

"Hello!" he said, as we appeared. He jerked a thumb toward the class-room. "I've locked dem in. What's doin', Buck?" he asked, indicating me with a languid nod.

"We're going t'roo de joint," explained Mr. MacGinnis. "De kid ain't in dere. Hump yourself, Sam!"

His colleague's languor disappeared with magic swiftness.

"Sam! Is dat Sam? Here, let me beat de block off'n him!"

Few points in this episode struck me as more remarkable than the similarity of taste which prevailed, as concerned myself, among the members of Mr. MacGinnis's gang. Men, doubtless, of varying opinions on other subjects, on this one point they were unanimous. They all wanted to assault me.

Buck, however, had other uses for me. For the present, I was necessary as a guide, and my value as such would probably be impaired were the block—whatever that was—to be beaten off me. Though feeling no more friendly toward me than did his assistants, he declined to allow sentiment to interfere with business. He concentrated his attention on the upward journey with all the earnestness of the young gentleman in the poem who carried the banner with the strange device.

Briefly requesting his ally to can it—which he did—Buck urged me on with the muzzle of his pistol. The red-mustached man sank back against the wall again with an air of dejection, sucking his cigar like one who has had disappointments in life; while we passed on up the stairs and began to draw the rooms on the first floor.

These consisted of Mr. Abney's study and two dormitories. The study was empty, and the only occupants of the dormitories were three of the boys who had been stricken down with colds on the occasion of Mr. MacGinnis's last visit. They squeaked with surprise at the sight of the assistant master in such highly questionable company.

Buck eyed them disappointedly. I waited, with something of the feelings of a drummer taking a buyer round the sample-room.

"Get on," said Buck.

"Won't one of those do?"

"Hump yourself, Sam!"

"Call me Sammy," I urged. "We're old friends now."

"Don't get fresh," he said austere.

We moved on.

The top floor was even more deserted than the first. There was no one in the dormitories. The only other room was Mr. Abney's; and, as we came opposite it, a sneeze from within told of the sufferings of its occupant.

The sound stirred Buck MacGinnis to his depths. He "pointed" at the door like a hunting dog.

"Who's in dere?" he demanded.

"Only Mr. Abney. Better not disturb him. He has a bad cold."

He placed a wrong construction on my solicitude for my employer. His manner became excited.

"Open dat door, you!" he cried.

"It'll give him a nasty shock."

"G'wan! Open it!"

No one who is digging a Browning pistol into the small of my back will ever find me disobliging. I opened the door—knocking first, as a mild concession to the conventions—and the procession passed in.

My stricken employer was lying on his back, staring at the ceiling, and our entrance did not at first cause him to change this position.

"Yes?" he said thickly, and his face disappeared beneath a huge pocket-handkerchief.

Muffled sounds, as of distant explosions of dynamite, together with earthquake shudders of the bedclothes, told of another sneezing fit.

"I'm sorry to disturb you," I began, when Buck, ever the man of action with a scorn for palaver, strode past me, and, having prodded with the pistol that part of the bedclothes beneath which a rough calculation suggested that Mr. Abney's lower ribs were concealed, uttered the one word:

"Sa-a-ay!"

The head master sat up like a jack-in-the-box. One might almost say that he shot up. And then he saw Buck.

I cannot even faintly imagine what were Mr. Abney's emotions at that moment. He was a man who, from boyhood up, had led a quiet and regular life. Things like Buck had appeared to him hitherto, if they had appeared at all, only in dreams after injudicious suppers. Even in the ordinary costume of the Bowery gentleman, without such adventitious extras as masks and pistols, Buck was no beauty. With that

hideous strip of dingy-white linen on his face, he was a walking nightmare.

Mr. Abney's eyebrows had risen and his jaw had fallen to their uttermost limits. His hair, disturbed by contact with the pillow, gave the impression of standing on end. His eyes seemed to bulge like a snail's. He stared at Buck, fascinated.

"Say, you, quit rubberin'! Youse ain't in a dime museum. Where's dat Ford kid, huh?"

I have set down all Mr. MacGinnis's remarks as if they had been uttered in a bell-like voice with a clear and crisp enunciation; but, in doing so, I have flattered him. In reality, his mode of speech suggested that he had something large and unwieldy permanently stuck in his mouth; and it was not easy for a stranger to follow him. Mr. Abney signally failed to do so. He continued to gape helplessly, till the tension was broken by a sneeze.

One cannot interrogate a sneezing man with any satisfaction to oneself. Buck stood by the bedside in moody silence, waiting for the paroxysm to spend itself.

I, meanwhile, had remained where I stood, close to the door. As I waited for Mr. Abney to finish sneezing, for the first time since Buck's colleague Lefty had entered the class-room the idea of action occurred to me.

Until this moment, I suppose, the strangeness and unexpectedness of these happenings had numbed my brain. To precede Buck meekly up-stairs and to wait with equal meekness while he interviewed Mr. Abney had seemed the only course open to me. To one whose life has lain apart from such things, the hypnotic influence of a Browning pistol is almost irresistible.

But now, freed temporarily from this influence, I began to think; and, my mind making up for its previous inaction by working with unwonted swiftness, I formed a plan of action at once.

It was simple, but I had an idea that it would be effective. My strength lay in my intimate acquaintance with the geography of Sanstead House and Buck's comparative ignorance of it. Let me but get an adequate start, and he might find pursuit vain. It was this start which I saw my way to achieving.

To Buck it had not yet occurred that it was a tactical error to leave me between the door and himself. I suppose he relied too

implicitly on the mesmeric pistol. He was not even looking at me.

The next moment my fingers were on the switch of the electric light, and the room was in darkness.

There was a chair by the door. I seized it and swung it into the space between us. Then, springing back, I banged the door and ran.

I did not run without a goal in view. My objective was the study. This, as I have explained, was on the first floor. Its window looked out onto a strip of lawn at the side of the house, ending in a shrubbery. The drop would not be pleasant, but I seemed to remember a waterspout that ran up the wall close to the window; and, in any case, I was not in a position to be deterred by the prospect of a bruise or two.

I had not failed to realize that my position was one of extreme peril. When Buck, concluding the tour of the house, found that the Little Nugget was not there—as I had reason to know that he would—there was no room for doubt that he would withdraw the protection which he had extended to me, up to the present, in my capacity of guide. On me the disappointed fury of the raiders would fall. No prudent consideration for their own safety would restrain them.

If ever the future was revealed to man, I saw mine at that moment. My only chance was to get out into the grounds, where the darkness would make pursuit an impossibility.

It was an affair which must be settled one way or the other in a few seconds; and I calculated that it would take Buck just those few seconds to win his way past the chair and find the door-handle.

I was right. Just as I reached the study the door of the bedroom flew open and the house rang with shouts and the noise of feet on the uncarpeted landing. From the hall below came answering shouts, but with an interrogatory note in them. The assistants were willing but puzzled. They did not like to leave their posts without specific instructions, and Buck, shouting as he clattered over the bare boards, was unintelligible.

I was in the study, the door locked behind me, before they could arrive at an understanding. I sprang to the window.

The handle rattled. Voices shouted. A panel splintered beneath a kick, and the door shook on its hinges.

And then, for the first time, I think, in my life, panic gripped me, the sheer, blind fear which destroys the reason. It swept over me in a wave, that numbing terror which comes to one in dreams. Indeed, the thing had become dreamlike. I seemed to be standing outside myself, looking on at myself, watching myself heave and strain with bruised fingers at a window that would not open.

XVI

THE armchair critic, reviewing a situation calmly and at his ease, is apt to make too small allowances for the effect of hurry and excitement on the human mind. He is cool and detached. He sees exactly what ought to have been done, and by what simple means catastrophe might have been averted.

He would have made short work of my present difficulty, I feel certain. It was ridiculously simple; but I had lost my head, and had ceased for the moment to be a reasoning creature.

In the end, indeed, it was no presence of mind, but pure good luck, which saved me. Just as the door, which had held out gallantly, gave way beneath the attack from outside, my fingers, slipping, struck against the catch of the window, and I understood why I had failed to raise it.

I snapped the catch back and flung up the sash. An icy wind swept into the room, bearing particles of snow. I scrambled onto the window-sill, and a crash from behind me told of the falling of the door.

The packed snow on the sill was chilling my knees as I worked my way out and prepared to drop. There was a deafening explosion inside the room, and simultaneously something seared my shoulder like a hot iron. I cried out with the pain of it, and, losing my balance, fell from the sill.

There was, fortunately for me, a laurel-bush immediately below the window, or I might have been seriously injured. I fell into it, all arms and legs, in a way which would probably have meant broken bones if I had struck the hard turf.

I was on my feet in an instant, shaken and scratched and, incidentally, in a worse temper than ever in my life before. The idea of flight, which had obsessed me a moment before to the exclusion of all other mundane affairs, had vanished absolutely. I was full of fight—I might say overflowing with it.

I remember standing there, with the snow trickling in chilly rivulets down my face and neck, and shaking my fist at the window. Two of my pursuers were leaning out of it, while a third dodged behind them, like a small man on the outskirts of a crowd. So far from being thankful for my escape, I was conscious only of a feeling of regret that there was no immediate way of getting at them.

They made no move toward traveling the quick but risky route which had commended itself to me. They seemed to be waiting for something to happen.

It was not long before I was made aware of what this something was. From the direction of the front door came the sound of one running. A sudden diminution of the noise of his feet told me that he had left the gravel and was on the turf. I drew back a pace or two, and waited.

It was pitch dark, and I had no fear that I should be seen. I was standing well outside the light from the window.

The man stopped just in front of me. A short parley followed.

"Can't yer see him?"

The voice was not Buck's. It was Buck who answered. And when I realized that this man in front of me, within easy reach, on whose back I was shortly about to spring, and whose neck I proposed, under Providence, to twist into the shape of a corkscrew, was no mere underling, but Mr. MacGinnis himself, I was filled with a joy which I found it exceedingly difficult to contain in silence.

Looking back, I am a little sorry for Mr. MacGinnis. He was not a good man. His mode of speech was not pleasant, and his manners were worse than his speech. But, though he undoubtedly deserved all that was coming to him, it was nevertheless bad luck for him to be standing just there at just that moment. The reaction after my panic, added to the pain of my shoulder, the scratches on my face, and the general misery of being wet and cold, had given me a reckless fury and a determination to do somebody, whoever happened to come along, grievous bodily hurt, such as seldom invades the bosoms of the normally peaceful. To put it crisply, I was fighting mad, and I looked on Buck as something sent by Heaven.

He had got as far, in his reply, as "Naw, I can't—" when I sprang.

I have read of the spring of the jaguar,

and I have seen some very creditable flying tackles made on the football field. I claim that my leap combined the outstanding qualities of both. I connected with Mr. MacGinnis in the region of the waist, and the howl he gave as we crashed to the ground was music to my ears.

But how true is the old Roman saying, "*Surgit amari aliquid*." Our pleasures are never perfect. There is always something. In the program which I had hastily mapped out the upsetting of Mr. MacGinnis was but a small item, a mere preliminary. There were several other things which I had wished to do to him, once upset; but it was not to be.

Even as I reached for his throat I perceived that the light of the window was undergoing an eclipse. A compact form had wriggled out upon the sill, as I had done, and I heard the grating of his shoes on the wall as he lowered himself for the drop.

There is a moment when the pleasantest functions must come to an end. I was loath to part from Mr. MacGinnis just when I was beginning, as it were, to do myself justice; but it was unavoidable. In another moment his ally would descend upon us, like some Homeric god swooping from a cloud, and I was not prepared to continue the battle against odds.

I disengaged myself—Mr. MacGinnis strangely quiescent during the progress—and was on my feet in the safety of the darkness just as the reenforcement touched earth. This time I did not wait. My hunger for fight had been appeased to some extent by my brush with Buck, and I was satisfied to have achieved safety with honor.

Making a wide détour, I crossed the drive and worked my way through the bushes to within a few yards of where the automobile stood, filling the night with the soft purring of its engine. I was interested to see what would be the enemy's next move. It was improbable that they would attempt to draw the grounds in search of me. I imagined that they would recognize failure and retire whence they had come.

I was right. I had not been watching long before a little group advanced into the light of the automobile's lamps. There were four of them. Three were walking; the fourth, cursing with the vigor and breadth that marks the expert, was lying

on their arms, with which they had made something resembling a stretcher.

The driver of the car, who had been sitting woodenly in his seat, turned at the sound.

"D'yer get him?" he inquired.

"Get nothing!" replied one of the three moodily. "De Nugget ain't dere, an' we was chasin' Sam to fix him, an' he laid for us, an' what he did to Buck was plenty!"

They placed their valuable burden in the body of the car, where he lay repeating himself, and two of them climbed in after him. The third seated himself beside the driver.

"Buck's leg's broke," he announced.

"Geel!" said the chauffeur.

No young actor receiving his first round of applause could have felt a keener thrill of gratification than I did at these words. Life may have nobler triumphs than the breaking of a kidnaper's leg, but I did not think so just then. It was with an effort that I stopped myself from cheering.

"Let her go!" said the man in the front seat.

The purring immediately rose to a roar. The car turned and began to move with increasing speed down the drive. Its drone grew fainter, and finally ceased. I brushed the snow from my coat and walked to the front door.

My first act on entering the house was to release White. He was still lying where I had seen him last. He appeared to have made no headway with the cords on his wrists and ankles. I came to his help with a rather dull pocket-knife. He rose stiffly, and began to chafe the injured arms in silence.

"They've gone," I said.

He nodded.

"Did they hit you with a sand-bag?"

He nodded again.

"I broke Buck's leg," I said, with modest pride.

He looked up incredulously. I related my experiences as briefly as possible; and when I came to the part where I made my flying tackle, the gloom was swept from his face by a joyful smile. Buck's injury may have given its recipient pain, but it was certainly the cause of pleasure to others. White's manner was one of the utmost enthusiasm as I described the scene.

"That'll hold Buck for a while!" was his comment. "I guess we sha'n't hear from him for a week or two. That's the

best cure for the headache I've ever struck!"

He rubbed the lump that just showed beneath his hair. I did not wonder at his emotion. Whoever had wielded the sand-bag had done his work well, in a manner to cause hard feelings on the part of the victim.

I had been vaguely conscious during this conversation of an intermittent noise like distant thunder. I now perceived that it came from Glossop's class-room, and was caused by the beating of hands on the door-panels. I remembered that the red-mustached man had locked Glossop and his young charges in. It seemed to me that he had done well. There would be plenty of confusion without their assistance.

I was turning toward my own class-room when I saw Audrey on the stairs, and went to meet her.

"It's all right," I said. "They've gone."

"Who was it? What did they want?"

"It was a gentleman named MacGinnis and some friends. They came after Ogden Ford, but they didn't get him."

"Where is he? Where is Ogden?"

Before I could reply babel broke loose. While we had been talking White had injudiciously turned the key of Glossop's class-room, which now disgorged its occupants, headed by my colleague, in a turbulent stream. At the same moment my own class-room began to empty itself. The hall was packed with boys, and the din became deafening. Every one had something to say, and they all said it at once.

Glossop was at my side, semaphoring violently.

"We must telephone," he bellowed in my ear, "for the police!"

Somebody tugged at my arm. It was Audrey. She was saying something which was drowned in the uproar. I drew her toward the stairs, and we found comparative quiet on the first landing.

"What were you saying?" I asked.

"He isn't there."

"Who?"

"Ogden Ford. Where is he? He is not in his room. Those men must have taken him away."

Glossop came up at a gallop, springing from stair to stair like the chamois of the Alps.

"We must telephone for the police!" he cried.

"I have telephoned," said Audrey, "ten minutes ago. They are sending some men at once. Mr. Glossop, was Ogden Ford in your class-room?"

"No, Mrs. Sheridan. I thought he was with you, Burns."

I shook my head.

"Those men came to kidnap him, Mr. Glossop," said Audrey.

"Undoubtedly the gang of scoundrels to which that man the other night belonged! This is preposterous. My nerves will not stand these repeated outrages. We must have police protection. The villains must be brought to justice. I never heard of such a thing! In an English school!"

Glossop's eyes gleamed with agitation behind their spectacles. Macbeth's deportment when confronted with Banquo's ghost was stolid by comparison. There was no doubt that Buck's visit had upset the peace of our happy little community to quite a considerable extent.

The noise in the hall had increased rather than subsided. A belated sense of professional duty returned to Glossop and myself. We descended the stairs and began to do our best, in our respective styles, to produce order.

It was not an easy task. Small boys are always prone to make a noise, even without provocation. When they get a genuine excuse like the incursion of men in white masks, who prod assistant masters in the small of the back with Browning pistols, they tend to eclipse themselves. I doubt whether we should ever have quieted them had it not been that the hour of Buck's visit had chanced to fall within a short time of that set apart for the boys' tea, and that the kitchen had lain outside the sphere of our visitors' operations.

As in many English country houses, the kitchen at Sanstead House was at the end of a long corridor, shut off by doors through which even pistol-shots penetrated but faintly. Our excellent cook had, moreover, the misfortune to be somewhat deaf, with the result that, throughout all the storm and stress in our part of the house, she, like the lady in Goethe's poem, had gone on cutting bread and butter; till now, when it seemed that nothing could quell the uproar, there rose above it the ringing of the bell.

If there is anything exciting enough to keep the English man or the English boy from his tea, it has yet to be discovered. The shouting ceased on the instant. The

general feeling seemed to be that inquiries could be postponed till a more suitable occasion, but not tea. There was a general movement in the direction of the dining-room.

Glossop had already gone with the crowd, and I was about to follow, when there was another ring at the front door-bell.

I gathered that this must be the police, and waited. In the impending inquiry I was by way of being a star witness. If any one had been in the thick of things from the beginning, it was myself.

White opened the door. I caught a glimpse of blue uniforms, and came forward to do the honors.

XVII

THERE were two of them, no more. In response to our urgent appeal for assistance against armed bandits, the majesty of the law had materialized itself in the shape of a stout inspector and a long, lean constable.

I thought, as I came to meet them, that they were fortunate to have arrived late. I could see Lefty and the red-mustached man, thwarted in their designs on me, making dreadful havoc among the official force, as here represented.

White, the simple butler once more, introduced us.

"This is Mr. Burns, one of the masters at the school," he said, and removed himself from the scene.

There never was a man like White for knowing his place when he played the butler. The inspector looked at me sharply. The constable gazed into space.

"H-m!" said the inspector.

Mentally I had named them Bones and Johnson. I do not know why, except that they seemed to deserve it.

"You telephoned for us," said Bones accusingly.

"We did."

"What's the trouble? What—got your note-book?—has been happening?"

Johnson removed his gaze from the middle distance, and produced a note-book.

"At about half past five—" I began. Johnson moistened his pencil. "At about half past five an automobile drove up to the front door. In it were five masked men with revolvers."

I interested them. There was no doubt of that. Bones's healthy color deepened and his eyes grew round. Johnson's pencil

fairly raced over the page, wabbling with emotion.

"Masked men!" echoed Bones.

"With revolvers," I said. "Now aren't you glad you didn't go to the circus? They rang the front door-bell; when White opened it they stunned him with a sand-bag. Then—"

Bones held up a large hand.

"Wait!"

I waited.

"Who is White?"

"The butler."

"I will take his statement. Fetch the butler."

Johnson trotted off obediently.

Left alone with me, Bones became friendlier and less official.

"This is as queer a start as ever I heard of, Mr. Burns," he said. "Twenty years I've been on the force, and nothing like this has transpired. What in the world do you suppose men with masks and revolvers were after? First idea I had was that you were making fun of me."

I was shocked at the idea. I hastened to give further details.

"They were a gang of American crooks who had come over to kidnap Mr. Elmer Ford's son, who is a pupil at the school. You have heard of Mr. Ford? He is an American millionaire, and there have been several attempts during the past few years to kidnap Ogden."

At this point Johnson returned with White. White told his story briefly, exhibited his bruise, showed the marks of the cords on his wrists and was dismissed. I suggested that further conversation had better take place in the presence of Mr. Abney, who, I imagined, would have something to say on the subject of hushing the thing up.

We went up-stairs. The broken door of the study delayed us a while and led to a fresh spasm of activity on the part of Johnson's pencil. Having disposed of this, we proceeded to Mr. Abney's room.

Bones's authoritative rap upon the door produced an agitated "Who's that?" from the occupant. I explained the nature of the visitation through the keyhole, and there came from within the sound of moving furniture. His one brief interview with Buck had evidently caused my employer to insure against a second by barricading himself in with everything he could find suitable for the purpose.

It was some moments before the way was clear for our entrance.

"Cub id!" said a voice at last.

Mr. Abney was sitting up in bed, the blankets wrapped tightly about him. His appearance was still disordered. The furniture of the room was in great confusion, and a poker on the floor by the dressing-table showed that he had been prepared to sell his life dearly.

"I ab glad to see you, idspector," he said. "Bister Burds, what is the explada-tion of this extraordinary affair?"

It took some time to explain matters to Mr. Abney, and more to convince Bones and his colleague that, so far from wanting a hue and cry raised over the country-side and columns about the affair in the papers, publicity was the thing we were anxious to avoid.

The policemen were visibly disappointed when they grasped the position of affairs. The thing, properly advertised, would have been the biggest that had ever happened in the neighborhood, and their eager eyes could see glory within easy reach. Mention of a cold snack and a drop of beer, however, to be found in the kitchen, served to cast a gleam of brightness on their gloom, and they vanished in search of it with something approaching cheeriness, Johnson taking notes to the last.

They had hardly gone when Glossop whirled into the room in a state of effervescing agitation.

"Mr. Abney, Ogden Ford is nowhere to be found!"

Mr. Abney greeted the information with a prodigious sneeze.

"What do you bead?" he demanded when the paroxysm was over. He turned to me. "Bister Burds, I understood you to—ah—say that the scou'drels took their departure without the boy Ford."

"They certainly did. I watched them go."

"I have searched the house thoroughly," said Glossop, "and there are no signs of him. And not only that. The boy Beckford cannot be found!"

Mr. Abney clasped his head in his hands. Poor man, he was in no condition to bear up with easy fortitude against this succession of shocks. He was like one who, having survived an earthquake, is hit by an automobile. He had partly adjusted his mind to the quiet contemplation of Mr. MacGinnis and friends when he was

called upon to face this fresh disaster. And he had a cold in the head, which unmans the stoutest. Napoleon would have won at Waterloo if Wellington had had a cold in the head.

"Augustus Beckford caddot be fou'd!" he echoed feebly.

"They must have run away together," said Glossop.

Mr. Abney sat up, galvanized.

"Such a thig has dever happened id the school before!" he cried. "It has always beed by—ah—codstant eddeavor to make my boys look upod Sadstead House as a happy hobe. I have systebatically edcouraged a spirit of cheerful codtment. I caddot seriously credit the fact that Augustus Beckford, ode of the bost charbig boys it has ever beed by good fortude to have id by charge, has deliberately rud away!"

"He must have been persuaded by that boy Ford," said Glossop; "who," he added morosely, "I believe is the evil one in disguise."

Mr. Abney did not rebuke the strength of Glossop's language. Probably the theory struck him as eminently sound. To me there certainly seemed something in it.

"Subthig bust be dode at once," Mr. Abney exclaimed. "It is iberative that we take ibbediate steps. They bust have gode to Londod. Bister Burds, you bust go to Londod by the next traid. I caddot go byself, with this cold."

It was the irony of fate that, on the one occasion when duty really summoned that champion runner-up-to-London to the metropolis, he should be unable to answer the call.

"Very well," I said. "I'll go and look up a train."

"Bister Glossop, you will be in charge of th school. Perhaps you had better go back to the boys dow."

White was standing in the hall when I got there.

"White," I said, "do you know anything about the trains to London?"

"Are you going to London?" he asked in his more conversational manner. I thought he looked at me curiously as he spoke.

"Yes. Ogden Ford and Augustus Beckford cannot be found. Mr. Abney thinks they must have run away to London."

"I shouldn't wonder," said White—dryly, it seemed to me. There was some-

thing distinctly odd in his manner. "And you're going after them?"

"Yes. I must look up a train."

"There is a fast train in an hour. You will have plenty of time."

"Will you tell Mr. Abney that, while I go and pack my bag? And telephone for a cab?"

"Sure," said White, nodding.

I went up to my room and began to put a few things together in a suit-case. I felt happy for several reasons. A visit to London, after my arduous weeks at Sanstead, was in the nature of an unexpected treat. My tastes are metropolitan, and the vision of an hour at a music-hall—I should be too late for the theaters—with supper to follow in some restaurant where there was an orchestra, appealed to me.

When I returned to the hall, carrying my bag, I found Audrey there.

"I'm being sent to London," I said.

"I know. White told me. Peter, bring him back!"

"That's why I'm being sent."

"It means everything to me."

I looked at her in surprise. There was a strained, anxious expression on her face, for which I could not account. I declined to believe that anybody could care what happened to the Little Nugget purely for that amiable youth's own sake. Besides, as he had gone to London willingly, the assumption was that he was enjoying himself.

"I don't understand," I said. "What do you mean?"

"I'll tell you. Mr. Ford sent me here to be near Ogden, to guard him. He knew that there was always danger of attempts being made to kidnap him, even though he was brought over to England very quietly. That is how I come to be here. I go wherever Ogden goes. I am responsible for him. And I have failed. If Ogden is not brought back, Mr. Ford will have nothing more to do with me. He never forgives failure. It will mean going back to the old work again, the dressmaking, or the waiting, or whatever I can manage to find." She gave a little shiver. "Peter, I can't! All the pluck has gone out of me. I'm afraid. I couldn't face all that again. Bring him back. You must. You will. Say you will!"

I did not answer. I could find nothing to say. For it was I who was responsible for all her trouble.

I had planned everything. I had given Ogden Ford the money that had taken him to London. And soon, unless I could reach London before it happened, and prevent him, he, with my valet Smith, would be in the Dover boat-train on his way to Monaco.

XVIII

It was only after many hours of thought that it had flashed upon me that the simplest and safest way of removing the Little Nugget was to induce him to remove himself. Once the idea had come, the rest was simple. The negotiations which had taken place that morning in the stable-yard had been brief.

I suppose that a boy in Ogden's position, with his record of narrow escapes from the kidnaper, comes to take as a matter of course things which would startle the ordinary boy. He assumed, I imagine, that I was the accredited agent of his mother, and that the money which I gave him for traveling expenses came from her.

Perhaps he had been expecting something of the sort. At any rate, he grasped the essential points of the scheme with amazing promptitude. His little hand was extended to receive the cash almost before I had finished speaking.

The main outline of my plan was that he should slip away to London during the afternoon; go to my rooms, where he would find Smith; and with Smith travel to his mother at Monaco. I had written to Smith, bidding him be in readiness for the expedition. There was no flaw in the scheme, as I had mapped it out; and though Ogden had complicated it a little by gratuitously luring away Augustus Beckford to bear him company, he had not endangered its success.

But now an utterly unforeseen complication had arisen. My one desire now was to undo everything for which I had been plotting.

I stood there, looking at her dumbly, hating myself for being the cause of the anxiety in her eyes. If I had struck her I could not have felt more despicable. In my misery I cursed Cynthia for leading me into this tangle.

I heard my name spoken, and turned, to find White at my elbow.

"Mr. Abney would like to see you, sir."

I went up-stairs, glad to escape. The tension of the situation had begun to tear at my nerves.

"Cub id, Bister Burds," said my employer, swallowing a lozenge. His aspect was more dazed than ever. "White has just bade an—ah—extraordinary cobbudication to be. It sees he is id reality a detective, ad employee of Pidkertod's Agedcy, of which you have of course—ah—heard."

So White had revealed himself! On the whole, I was not surprised. Certainly his motive for concealment—the fear of making Mr. Abney nervous—was removed. An inrush of Comanche Indians with tomahawks could hardly have added greatly to Mr. Abney's nervousness at the present juncture.

"Sent here by Mr. Ford, I suppose?" I said. I had to say something.

"Exactly. Ah—precisely!" He sneezed. "Bister Ford, without codsulting be—I do dot cobbod on the good taste or wisdod of his actiod—despatched White to apply for the post of butler at this—ah—house, his predecessor having left at a bobed's dotice, bribed to do so, I strodgly suspect, by Bister Ford himself. I bay be wrodgig Bister Ford, but I do dot thig so."

I thought his reasoning sound.

"All thad, however," resumed Mr. Abney, removing his face from a jug of menthol at which he had been sniffing with the tense concentration of a dog at a rabbit-hole, "is beside the point. I berely bedtiod it to explaid why White will accompady you to London."

"What?"

The exclamation was forced from me by my dismay. This was appalling. If this infernal detective was to accompany me, my chance of bringing Ogden back was gone. It had been my intention to go straight to my rooms, in the hope of finding him not yet departed; but how was I to explain his presence there to White?

"I don't think it's necessary, Mr. Abney," I protested. "I am sure I can manage this affair by myself."

"Two heads are better thad wud," said the invalid sententiously, burying his features in the jug once more.

"Too many cooks spoil the broth," I replied. If the conversation was to consist of copy-book maxims, I could match him as long as he pleased.

He did not keep up the intellectual level of the discussion.

"Dodsed," he snapped, with the irritation of a man whose proverb has been capped by another. I had seldom heard

him speak so sharply. White's revelation had evidently impressed him. He had all the ordinary peaceful man's reverence for the professional detective. "White will accompady you, Bister Burds," he said doggedly.

"Very well," I said.

After all, it might be that I should get an opportunity of giving my unwelcome companion the slip. London is a large city.

A few minutes later the cab arrived, and White and I set forth on our mission.

We did not talk much in the cab. I was too busy with my thoughts to volunteer remarks, and White, apparently, had meditations of his own to occupy him. It was when we had settled ourselves in an empty compartment and the train had started that he found speech. I had provided myself with a book as a barrier against conversation, and began at once to make a pretense of reading, but he broke through my defenses.

"Interesting book, Mr. Burns?"

"Very," I said.

"Life's more interesting than books."

I made no comment on this profound but not wholly original observation. He was not discouraged.

"Mr. Burns," he said, after the silence had lasted a few moments.

"Yes?"

"Let's talk for a spell. These train journeys are pretty slow."

Again I seemed to detect that curious undercurrent of meaning in his voice which I had noticed in the course of our brief exchange of remarks in the hall. I glanced up and met his eye. He was looking at me in a way that struck me as curious. There was something in those bright brown eyes of his which had the effect of making me vaguely uneasy. Something seemed to tell me that he had a definite motive in forcing his conversation on me.

"I guess I can interest you a heap more than that book, even if it's the darnedest best-seller that was ever hatched."

"Oh!"

He lit a cigarette.

"You didn't want me around on this trip, did you?"

"It seemed rather unnecessary for both of us to go," I said indifferently. "Still, perhaps two heads are better than one, as Mr. Abney remarked. What do you propose to do when you get to London?"

He bent forward and tapped me on the knee.

"I propose to stick to you like a label on a bottle, sonny," he said. "That's what I propose to do."

"What do you mean?"

I was finding it difficult, such is the effect of a guilty conscience, to meet his eye, and the fact irritated me.

"I want to find out that address you gave the Ford kid this morning out in the stable-yard."

It is strange how really literal some figurative expressions are. I had read stories in which an astonished character's heart leaped into his mouth. For an instant I could have supposed that mine had actually done so. The illusion of some solid object blocking up my throat was extraordinarily vivid, and there certainly seemed to be a vacuum in the spot where my heart should have been.

Not for a substantial reward could I have uttered a word at that moment. I could not even breathe. The horrible unexpectedness of the blow had completely paralyzed me.

White, however, was apparently prepared to continue the chat without my assistance.

"I guess you didn't know I was around, or you wouldn't have talked that way. Well, I was, and I heard every word you said. Here was the money, you said, and he was to take it and break for London, and go to the address on this card, and your pal Smith would look after him. I guess there had been some talk before that, but I didn't arrive in time to hear it. But I heard all I wanted, except that address. And that's what I'm going to find out when we get to London."

He gave out this appalling information in a rich and soothing voice, as if it were some ordinary commonplace. To me it seemed to end everything. I imagined I was already as good as under arrest. What a fool I had been to discuss such a matter in a place like a stable-yard, however apparently empty it might be! I ought to have known that at a school there are no empty places.

"I must say it jarred me when I heard you pulling that stuff," continued White. "I haven't what you might call a child-like faith in my fellow man as a rule, but it had never occurred to me for a moment that you could be playing that game. It

only shows," he added philosophically, "that you've got to suspect everybody when it comes to a gilt-edged proposition like the Little Nugget."

The train rattled on. I tried to reduce my mind to working order, to formulate some plan, but I could not. Beyond the realization that I was in the tightest corner of my life, I seemed to have lost the power of thought.

White resumed his monologue.

"You had me guessing," he admitted. "I couldn't figure you out. First thing, of course, I thought you must be working in with Buck MacGinnis and his crowd. Then all that happened to-night, and I saw that, whoever you might be working in with, it wasn't Buck. And now I've placed you. You're not in with any one. You're just playing it by yourself. I shouldn't mind betting this was your first job, and that you just saw your chance of making a pile by holding up old man Ford. You thought it was better than schoolmastering, and grabbed it."

He leaned forward and tapped me on the knee again. There was something indescribably irritating in the action. As one who has had experience, I can state that while to be arrested at all is bad, to be arrested by a detective with a fatherly manner is maddening.

"See here," he said. "We must get together over this business."

I suppose it was the recollection of the same words in the mouth of Buck MacGinnis that made me sit up with a jerk and stare at him.

"We'll make a great team," he said, still in that same cozy voice. "If ever there was a case of fifty-fifty, this is it! You've got the kid, and I've got you. I can't get away with him without your help, and you can't get away with him unless you square me. It's a stand-off. The only thing is to sit in at the game together and share out. Does it go?"

He beamed kindly on my bewilderment during the space of time it takes to select a cigarette and light a match. Then, blowing a contented puff of smoke, he crossed his legs and leaned back.

"When I told you I was a Pinkerton man, sonny," he said, "I missed the cold truth by about a mile; but you caught me shooting off guns in the grounds, and it was up to me to say something."

He blew a smoke-ring and watched it

dreamily till it melted in the draft from the ventilator.

"I'm Smooth Sam Fisher," he said.

XIX

WHEN two emotions clash, the weaker goes to the wall. Any surprise I might have felt was swallowed up in my relief. If I had been at liberty to be astonished, my companion's information would no doubt have astonished me. But I was not. I was so much relieved to find that he was not a Pinkerton man that I did not greatly care what else he might be.

"It's always been a habit of mine in these little matters," he went on, "to let other folks do the rough work and chip in myself when they've cleared the way. It saves trouble and expense. I don't travel with a gang, like that boneheaded Buck. What's the use of a gang? They only get tumbling over one another and spoiling everything. Look at Buck! Where is he? Down and out; while I—"

He smiled complacently. His manner annoyed me. I objected to being looked upon as a humble catspaw by this bland scoundrel.

"While you—what?" I said.

He looked at me in mild surprise.

"Why, I come in with you, sonny, and take my share like a gentleman."

"Do you?"

"Well, don't I?" He looked at me in the half-reproachful, half-affectionate manner of the kind old uncle who reasons with a headstrong nephew. "Young man," he said, "you surely aren't thinking you can put one over on me in this business? Tell me you don't take me for that sort of ivory-skulled boob! Do you imagine for one instant, sonny, that I'm not next to every move in this game? Are you deluding yourself with the idea that this thing isn't a perfect cinch for me? Let's hear what's troubling you. You seem to have some foolish ideas in your head. Let's talk it over quietly."

"If you have no objection," I said, "no, I don't want to talk to you, Mr. Fisher. I don't like you, and I don't like your way of earning your living. Buck MacGinnis was bad enough, but at least he was a straightforward tough. There's no excuse for you."

"Surely we are unusually righteous this afternoon, are we not?" said Sam suavely.

I did not answer.

"Is this mere professional jealousy?" he inquired.

This was too much for me.

"Do you imagine for a moment that I'm doing this for money?"

"I did have that impression. Was I wrong? Do you kidnap the sons of millionaires for your health?"

"I promised that I would get this boy back to his mother. That is why I gave him the money to go to London. And that is why my valet was to have taken him to—to where Mrs. Ford is."

He did not reply in words, but if ever eyebrows spoke, his said:

"My dear sir, really!"

I could not remain silent under their patent disbelief.

"That's the simple truth," I said.

He shrugged his shoulders, as who should say:

"Have it your own way. Let us change the subject."

"You say 'was to have taken.' Have you changed your plans?"

"Yes. I'm going to take the boy back to the school."

He laughed—a rich, rolling laugh. His double chin shook comfortably.

"It won't do, young man," said Sam, shaking his head with humorous reproach. "It won't do."

"You don't believe me?"

"Frankly, I do not."

"Very well," I said, and began to read my book.

"If you want to give me the slip," he chuckled, "you must do better than that. I can see you bringing the Nugget back to the school!"

"You will see me do just that, if you wait," I said.

"I wonder what that address was that you gave him!" he mused. "Well, I shall soon know."

He relapsed into silence. The train rolled on. I looked at my watch. London was not far off now.

"The present arrangement of equal division," said Sam, breaking a long silence, "holds good, of course, only in the event of your quitting this fool game and doing the square thing by me. Let me put it plainly. We are either partners or competitors. It is for you to decide. If you will be sensible, and tell me that address, I will pledge my word—"

"Your word!" I said scornfully.

"Honor among thieves!" replied Sam with unruffled geniality. "I wouldn't double-cross you for worlds. If, however, you think you can manage without my assistance, it will then be my melancholy duty to beat you to the kid, and collect him and the money entirely on my own account. Am I to take it," he said, as I was silent, "that you prefer war to an alliance?"

I turned a page of my book and went on reading.

"If youth but knew!" he sighed. "Young man, I am nearly twice your age, and I have, at a modest estimate, about ten times as much sense. Yet, in your overweening self-confidence, with your ungovernable gall, you fancy you are clever enough to hand me a lemon. *Me!* I should smile!"

"Do," I said. "Do, while you can."

He shook his head reprovingly.

"You will not be so fresh, sonny, in a few hours. You will be biting pieces out of yourself, I fear. And later on, when my automobile splashes you with mud in Piccadilly, you will taste the full bitterness of remorse. Well, youth must buy its experience, I suppose!"

I looked across at him, as he sat plump and rosy and complacent, puffing at his cigarette, and my heart warmed to the old ruffian. It was impossible to maintain an attitude of righteous iciness with him. I might loathe his mode of life, and hate him as a representative—and a leading representative—of one of the most contemptible trades on earth, but there was a sunny charm about the man himself which made it hard to feel hostile to him as an individual.

I closed my book with a bang and burst out laughing.

"You're a wonder!" I said.

He beamed at what he took to be evidence that I was coming round to the friendly and sensible view of the matter.

"Then you think, on consideration—" he said. "Excellent! Now, my dear young man, all joking aside, you will take me with you to that address, will you not? You observe that I do not ask you to give it to me. Let there be not so much as the faintest odor of the double-cross about this business. All I ask is that you should allow me to accompany you to where the Nugget is hidden, and should then rely on my wider experience of this sort of game

to get him safely away and to open negotiations with the dad."

"I suppose your experience has been wide?" I said.

"Quite tolerably."

"Doesn't it ever worry you, the anxiety and misery you cause?"

"Purely temporary, both. And then, look at it in another way. Think of the joy and relief of the bereaved parents when sonny comes toddling home again! Surely it is worth some temporary distress to taste that supreme happiness? In a sense, you might call me a human benefactor. I teach parents to appreciate their children. You know what parents are. Father gets caught short in cotton or wheat one morning. When he reaches home, what does he do? He eases his mind by snapping at Little Willie. Mrs. Van First-Family forgets to invite mother to her freak dinner. What happens? Mother takes it out of William. They love him, maybe, but they are too used to him. They do not realize all he is to them. And then, one afternoon, he disappears. The agony! The remorse! 'How could I ever have told our lost angel to stop his darned noise?' moans father. 'I struck him once!' sobs mother. 'With this jeweled hand I spanked our vanished darling!' 'We were not worthy to have him,' they wail together. 'But, oh, if we could but get him back!' Well, they do. They get him back as soon as ever they care to come across in unmarked hundred-dollar bills. And after that they think twice before working off their grouches on the poor kid. So I bring universal happiness into the home. I don't say father doesn't get a twinge every now and then when he catches sight of the hole in his bank-balance, but, blame it all, what's money for if it's not to spend?"

He snorted with altruistic fervor.

"What makes you so set on kidnaping Ogden Ford?" I asked. "I know he is valuable, but you must have made your pile by this time. I gather that you have been practising your particular brand of philanthropy for a good many years. Why don't you retire?"

He sighed.

"It is the dream of my life to retire, young man. You may not believe me, but my instincts are thoroughly domestic. When I have the leisure to weave day-dreams, they center around a cozy little

home with a nice porch and stationary wash-tubs."

He regarded me closely, as if to decide whether I was worthy of these confidences. There was something wistful in his brown eyes. I suppose the inspection must have been favorable, or he was in a mood when a man must unbosom himself to some one, for he proceeded to open his heart to me. A man in his particular line of business, I imagine, finds few confidants, and the strain probably becomes intolerable at times.

"Have you ever experienced the love of a good woman, sonny? It's a wonderful thing." He brooded sentimentally for a moment, then continued, and—to my mind—somewhat spoiled the impressiveness of his opening words. "The love of a good woman," he said, "is about the most blamed wonderful lay-out that ever came down the pike. I know! I've had some of it myself."

A spark from his cigarette fell on his hand. He swore a startled oath.

"We came from the same old town," he resumed, having recovered from this interlude. "Used to be kids at the same school. Walk to school together—me carrying her luncheon-basket and helping her over the fences. Ah! Just the same when we grew up—still pals. That was twenty years ago. The arrangement was that I should go out and make the money to buy the home, and then come back and marry her."

"Then why haven't you done it?" I said severely.

He shook his head.

"If you know anything about crooks, young man," he said, "you'll know that outside of their own line they are the easiest marks that ever happened. They fall for anything. At least, it's always been that way with me. No sooner did I get together a sort of pile and start out for the old town, when some smooth stranger would come along and steer me up against some skin game, and back I'd have to go to work. That happened a few times, and when I did manage at last to get home with the dough I found she had married another guy. It's hard on women, you see," he explained chivalrously. "They get lonesome, and Roving Rupert doesn't show up, so they have to marry Stay-at-Home Henry just to keep from getting the horrors."

"So she's Mrs. Stay-at-Home Henry now?" I said sympathetically.

"She was till a year ago. She's a widow now. Deceased had a misunderstanding with a hydrophobia skunk, so I'm informed. I believe he was a good man. Outside of licking him at school, I didn't know him well. I saw her just before I left to come here. She's as fond of me as ever. It's all settled, if only I can connect with the mazuma. And she don't want much, either—just enough to keep the home together."

"I wish you happiness," I said.

"You can do better than that. You can take me with you to that address."

I avoided the subject.

"What does she say to your way of making money?" I asked.

"She don't know, and she ain't going to know. I don't see why a man has got to tell his wife every little thing in his past. She thinks I'm a drummer, traveling in England for a dry-goods firm. She wouldn't stand for the other thing, not for a minute. She's very particular. Always was. That's why I'm going to quit after I've won out over this thing of the Little Nugget." He looked at me hopefully. "So you *will* take me along, sonny, won't you?"

I shook my head.

"You won't?"

"I'm sorry to spoil a romance, but I can't. You must look around for some other home into which to bring happiness. The Fords' is barred."

"You are very obstinate, young man," he said sadly but without any apparent ill-feeling. "I can't persuade you to take the only sensible course?"

"No."

"Ah, well! So we are to be rivals, not allies. You will regret this, sonny. I may say you will regret it very bitterly. When you see me in my auto—"

"You mentioned your automobile before."

"Ah! So I did."

The train had stopped, as trains always do on English railways, before entering a terminus. Presently it began to move forward hesitatingly, as if saying to itself:

"Now, am I really wanted here? Shall I be welcome?"

Eventually, after a second halt, it glided slowly alongside the platform.

I sprang out and ran to the cab-rank. I was aboard a taxi, bowling out of the station, before the train had stopped.

Peeping out of the window at the back, I was unable to see Sam. My adroit move, I took it, had baffled him. I had left him standing.

XX

It was a quarter of an hour's drive to my rooms, but to me, in my anxiety, it seemed more. This was going to be a close thing, and success or failure a matter of minutes. If he followed my instructions, Smith would be starting for the Continental boat-train to-night with his companion; and, working out the distances, I saw that, by the time I could arrive, he might already have left my rooms.

Sam's supervision at the Sanstead station had made it impossible for me to send a telegram. I had had to trust to chance. Fortunately my train, by a miracle, had been up to time, and at my present rate of progress I ought to catch Smith a few minutes before he left the building.

The cab pulled up. I ran up the stairs and opened the door of my apartment.

"Smith!" I called.

A chair scraped along the floor and a door opened at the end of the passage. Smith came out.

"Thank goodness, you have not started! I thought I should miss you. Where is the boy?"

"The boy, sir?"

"They boy I wrote to you about."

"He has not arrived, sir."

"Not arrived?"

"No, sir."

I stared at him blankly.

"How long have you been here?"

"All day, sir."

"You have not been out?"

"Not since the hour of two, sir."

"I can't understand it," I said.

"Perhaps the young gentleman changed his mind and never started, sir?"

"I know he started."

Smith had no further suggestion to offer.

"Pending the young gentleman's arrival, sir, I remain in London?"

Before I could reply, a fruity voice spoke at the door behind me.

"What? Hasn't he arrived?"

I turned. There, beaming and benevolent, stood Mr. Fisher.

"It occurred to me to look your name up in the telephone directory," he explained. "I might have thought of that before!"

"Come in here," I said, opening the door of the sitting-room.

I did not want to discuss the thing with him before Smith. He looked about the room admiringly.

"So these are your quarters," he said. "You do yourself pretty well, young man. So I understand that the Nugget has gone wrong in transit? He has altered his plans on the way?"

"I can't understand it."

"I can! You gave him a certain amount of money?"

"Yes. Enough to get him to—where he was going."

"Then, knowing the boy, I should say that he has found other uses for it. He's whooping it up in London, and, I should fancy, having the time of his young life." He got up. "This, of course," he said, "radically alters any understanding we may have come to, sonny. All idea of a partnership is now out of the question. I wish you well, but I have no further use for you. Somewhere in this great city the Little Nugget is hiding, and I mean to find him—entirely on my own account. This is where our paths divide, Mr. Burns. Good night!"

When Sam had left, which he did rather in the manner of a heavy father in melodrama shaking the dust of an erring son's threshold off his feet, I mixed myself a high-ball, and sat down to consider the position of affairs. It did not take me long to see that the miserable boy had double-crossed me with a smooth effectiveness which Mr. Fisher himself might have envied. Somewhere in this great city, as Sam had observed, he was hiding; but where? "London" is a vague address.

I wondered what steps Sam was taking. Was there some underground secret-service bureau to which persons of his profession had access? I doubted it. I imagined that he, as I proposed to do, was drawing the city at a venture in the hope of flushing the quarry by accident.

Yet such was the impression he had made upon me as a man of resource and sagacity that I did not relish the idea of his getting a start on me even in a venture so uncertain as this. My imagination began to picture him miraculously inspired in the search; and such was the vividness of the vision that I jumped up from my chair, resolved to get on the trail at once.

It was hopelessly late, however, and I did not anticipate that I should meet with any success.

Nor did I. For two hours and a half I tramped the streets, my spirits sinking more and more under the influence of failure and of a disagreeable blend of snow and sleet which had begun to fall. Then, tired out, I went back to my rooms and climbed sorrowfully into bed.

It was odd to wake up and realize that I was in London. Years seemed to have passed since I had left it. Time is a thing of emotions, not of hours and minutes, and I had certainly packed a considerable number of emotional moments into my stay at Sanstead House. I lay in bed, reviewing the past, while Smith, with a cheerful clatter of crockery, prepared my breakfast in the next room.

A curious lethargy had succeeded the feverish energy of the previous night. More than ever the impossibility of finding the needle in this human bundle of hay oppressed me. No one is optimistic before breakfast, and I regarded the future with dull resignation, turning my thoughts from it, after a while, to the past. But the past meant Audrey, and to think of Audrey hurt.

It seemed curious to me that in a life of thirty years I should have been able to find, among the hundreds of women I had met, only one capable of creating in me that disquieting welter of emotions which is called love. It was hard that that one should reciprocate my feeling only to the extent of the mild liking which Audrey entertained for me.

I tried to analyze her qualifications for the place she held in my heart. I had known women who had attracted me more physically, and women who had attracted me more mentally. I had known wiser women, handsomer women, more amiable women, but none of them had affected me like Audrey.

The problem was inexplicable. Any idea that we might be affinities, soul-mates destined for each other from the beginning of time, was disposed of by the fact that my attraction for her was apparently in inverse ratio to hers for me.

For possibly the millionth time in the past five years I tried to picture in my mind the man Sheridan, that shadowy wooer to whom she had yielded so readily. What quality had he possessed that I did

not? Wherein lay the magnetism that had brought about his triumph?

These were unprofitable speculations. I laid them aside until the next occasion when I should feel disposed for self-torture, and got out of bed. A bath and breakfast braced me up, and I left the house in a reasonably cheerful frame of mind.

To search at random for an individual unit among London's millions lends an undeniable attraction to a day in town. In a desultory way I pursued my investigations through the morning and afternoon, but neither of Ogden nor of his young friend Augustus Beckford was I vouchsafed a glimpse. My consolation was that Smooth Sam was probably being equally unsuccessful.

Toward evening there arose the question of return to Sanstead. I had not gathered whether Mr. Abney had intended to set any time-limit on my wanderings, or whether I was not supposed to come back except with the deserters. I decided that I had better remain in London for another night, at any rate, and went to the nearest post-office to send Mr. Abney a telegram to that effect.

As I was writing it, the problem which had baffled me for twenty-four hours solved itself in less than a minute.

XXI

WHETHER my powers of inductive reasoning had been under a cloud since I left Sanstead, or whether they were normally beneath contempt, I do not pretend to know; but the fact remains that hitherto I had completely overlooked the obvious solution of my difficulty.

I must have been thinking so exclusively of the Little Nugget that I had entirely forgotten the existence of Augustus Beckford. It occurred to me now that, by making inquiries at the latter's house, I should learn something to my advantage. A boy of the Augustus type does not run away from school without a reason. Probably some party was taking place to-night at the ancestral home, at which, tempted by the lawless Nugget, he had decided that his presence was necessary.

I knew the house well. There had been a time, when Lord Mountry and I were at Oxford, when I had spent frequent week-ends there. Since then, owing to being abroad, I had seen little of the family.

Now was the moment to reintroduce myself. I hailed a cab.

Inductive reasoning had not played me false. There was a red carpet outside the house, and from within came the sounds of music.

Lady Wroxham, the mother of Mountry and the vanishing Augustus, was one of those women who take things as they come. She did not seem surprised at seeing me.

"How nice of you to come and see us!" she said. "Somebody told me you were abroad. Ted is in the south of France, in the yacht. Augustus is here. Mr. Abney, his schoolmaster, let him come up for the night." I perceived that Augustus had been playing a bold game. I saw the coaching of Ogden behind this dashing falsehood. "You will hardly remember Sybil. She was quite a baby when you were here last. She is having her birthday party this evening."

"May I go in and help?" I said.

"I wish you would. They would love it, I know."

I doubted it, but went in. A dance had just finished. Strolling toward me, in his tightest Eton suit, his face shining with honest joy, was the errant Augustus. Close behind him, wearing the *blasé* air of one for whom custom had staled the pleasures of life, was the Little Nugget.

I think they both saw me at the same moment. The effect of my appearance on them was illustrative of their respective characters. Augustus turned a deep shade of purple and fixed me with a horrified stare. The Nugget winked. Augustus halted and shuffled his feet. The Nugget strolled up and accosted me like an old friend.

"Hello!" he said. "How did you get here? Say, I was going to try and get you on the phone some old time and explain things. I've been pretty much on the jump since I hit London."

"You little brute!"

My gleaming eye, traveling past him, met that of the Hon. Augustus Beckford, causing that youth to jump guiltily. The Nugget looked over his shoulder.

"I guess we don't want him around, if we're to talk business," he said. "I'll go and tell him to beat it."

"You'll do nothing of the kind. I don't propose to lose sight of either of you."

"Oh, he's all right! You don't have to worry about him. He was going back to

the school to-morrow, anyway. He only ran away to go to this party. Why not let him enjoy himself while he's here? I'll go and make a date for you to meet at the end of the show."

He approached his friend and a short colloquy ensued, which ended in the latter shuffling off in the direction of the other revelers. Such is the buoyancy of youth that a moment later he was dancing a two-step with every appearance of careless enjoyment. The future, with its storms, seemed to have slipped from his mind.

"That's all right," said the Nugget, returning to me. "He's promised he won't duck away. You'll find him somewhere around whenever you care to look for him. Now we can talk."

"I hardly like to trespass on your valuable time," I said.

The airy way in which this demon boy handled what should have been—to him—an embarrassing situation irritated me. For all the authority I seemed to have over him I might have been the potted palm against which he was leaning.

"That's all right!" Everything appeared to be all right with him. "This sort of thing does not appeal to me. Don't be afraid of spoiling my evening. I only came because Becky was so set on it. Dancing bores me pallid. Let's get somewhere where we can sit down and talk."

I was beginning to feel that a children's party was the right place for me. Sam Fisher had treated me as a child, and so did the Little Nugget. That I was a responsible person, well on in my thirty-first year, with a narrow escape from death and a hopeless love-affair on my record, seemed to strike neither of them.

I followed my companion to a secluded recess with the utmost meekness. He leaned back and crossed his legs.

"Got a cigarette?"

"I have not got a cigarette. And, if I had, I wouldn't give it to you."

He regarded me tolerantly.

"Got a grouch to-night, haven't you? You seem all flittered up about something. What's the trouble? Sore about my not showing up at your apartment? I'll explain that all right."

"I shall be glad to listen."

"It's like this. It suddenly occurred to me that a day or two one way or the other wasn't going to affect our deal, and that while I was about it I might just as well

see a bit of London before I left. I suggested it to Becky, and the idea made the biggest kind of a hit with him. I found he had only been in an automobile once in his life. Can you beat it? I've had one of my own ever since I was a kid. Well, naturally, it was up to me to blow him to a joy-ride; and that's where the money went."

"Where the money went?"

"Sure. I've got about two dollars left, and that's all. It wasn't altogether the automobiling. It was the meals that got away with my roll. Say, that kid Beckford is one swell feeder! He's wrapping himself around the eats all the time. I guess it's not smoking that does it. I haven't the appetite I used to have. Well, that's how it was, you see; but I'm through now. Cough up the fare, and I'll make the trip to-morrow. Mother'll be tickled to death to see me."

"She won't see you. We're going back to the school to-morrow."

He looked at me incredulously.

"What's that? Going back to school?"

"I've altered my plans."

"I'm not going back to any old school! You daren't take me! Where'll you be if I tell the hot-air merchant about our deal and you slipping me the money and all that?"

"Tell him what you like. He won't believe it."

He thought this over, and its truth came home to him. The complacent expression left his face.

"What's the matter with you? Are you dippy, or what? You get me away up to London, and the first thing that happens when I'm here is that you want to take me back. You make me tired!"

It was borne in upon me that there was something in his point of view. My sudden change of mind must have seemed inexplicable to him. Having by a miracle succeeded in finding him, I was in a mood to be generous. I unbent.

"Ogden, old sport," I said cordially, "I think we've both had all we want of this children's party. You're bored, I can see, and if I stay here for another half-hour I may be called on to entertain these infants with comic songs. We men of the world are above this sort of thing. Get your hat and coat, and I'll take you to a show. We can discuss business later over a bit of supper."

The gloom of his countenance melted into a pleased smile.

"You said something that time!" he observed joyfully; and we slunk away to get our hats, the best of friends.

I left with the butler a note for Augustus Beckford, requesting his presence at Waterloo Station at ten minutes past twelve on the following morning, without fail. There was a certain informality about my methods, which I doubt if Mr. Abney would have wholly approved, but I felt that I could rely on Augustus.

Much may be done by kindness. By the time the curtain fell on the musical comedy which we had attended all was peace between the Nugget and myself. Supper cemented our friendship, and we drove back to my rooms on excellent terms with each other. Half an hour later he was snoring in the spare room, while I smoked contentedly before the fire in the sitting-room.

I had not been there five minutes when the bell rang. Smith was in bed, so I went to the door myself and found Mr. Fisher on the mat.

My feeling of benevolence toward all created things, the result of my successful handling of the Little Nugget, embraced Sam. I invited him in.

"Well," I said, when I had given him a cigar and filled his glass, "and how have you been getting on, Mr. Fisher? Any luck?"

He shook his head at me reproachfully.

"Young man, you're deep. I've got to hand it to you. I underestimated you. You're very deep!"

"Approbation from Smooth Sam Fisher is praise indeed. But why these stately compliments?"

"You took me in, young man. I don't mind owning it. When you told me the Nugget had gone astray I lapped it up like a babe. And all the time you were putting one over on me. Well, well!"

"But he had gone astray, Mr. Fisher."

He knocked the ash off his cigar. He wore a pained look.

"You needn't keep it up, sonny. I happened to be standing within three yards of you when you got into a cab with him in Shaftesbury Avenue."

I laughed.

"Well, if that's the case, let there be no secrets between us. He's asleep in the next room."

Sam leaned forward earnestly and tapped me on the knee.

"Young man, this is a critical moment. This is where, if you aren't careful, you may undo all the good work you have done by getting chesty and thinking that, because you've won out so far, you're the whole show. Believe me, the difficult part is to come, and it's right here that you need an experienced man to work in with you. Let me in on this, and leave the negotiations with old man Ford to me. You would only make a mess of them. I've handled this kind of thing a dozen times, and I know just how to act. You won't regret taking me on as a partner. You won't lose a cent by it. I can work him for at least double what you would get, even supposing you didn't make a mess of the deal and get nothing."

"It's very good of you, but there won't be any negotiations with Mr. Ford. I am taking the boy back to Sanstead, as I told you." I caught his pained eye. "I'm afraid you don't believe me."

He drew at his cigar a moment without replying.

It is a human weakness to wish to convince those who doubt us, even if their opinion is not intrinsically valuable. I remembered that I had Cynthia's letter in my pocket. I produced it as "exhibit A" in my evidence, and read it to him.

Sam listened carefully.

"I see," he said. "Who wrote that letter?"

"Never mind! A friend of mine." I returned the letter to my pocket. "I was going to have sent him over to Monaco, but I altered my plans. Something interfered."

"What?"

"I might call it conscience—if you know what that means."

"And you are really going to take him back to the school?"

"I am."

"We shall travel back together," he said. "I had hoped I had seen the last of the place. The English countryside may be delightful in the summer, but for winter give me London. However!" He sighed resignedly, and rose from his chair. "I will say good-by till to-morrow. What train do you catch?"

"Do you mean to say," I demanded, "that you have the nerve to come back to Sanstead after what you have told me about yourself?"

"You entertain some idea of exposing me to Mr. Abney? Forget it, young man. We are both in glass houses. Don't let us throw stones. Besides, would he believe it? What proof have you?"

I had thought this argument tolerably sound when I had used it on the Nugget. Now that it was used on myself, I realized its soundness even more thoroughly. My hands were tied.

"Yes," said Sam, "to-morrow, after our little jaunt to London, we shall all resume the quiet rural life once more." He beamed expansively upon me from the doorway. "However, even the quiet rural life has its interests. I guess we sha'n't be dull!" he said.

I believed him.

XXII

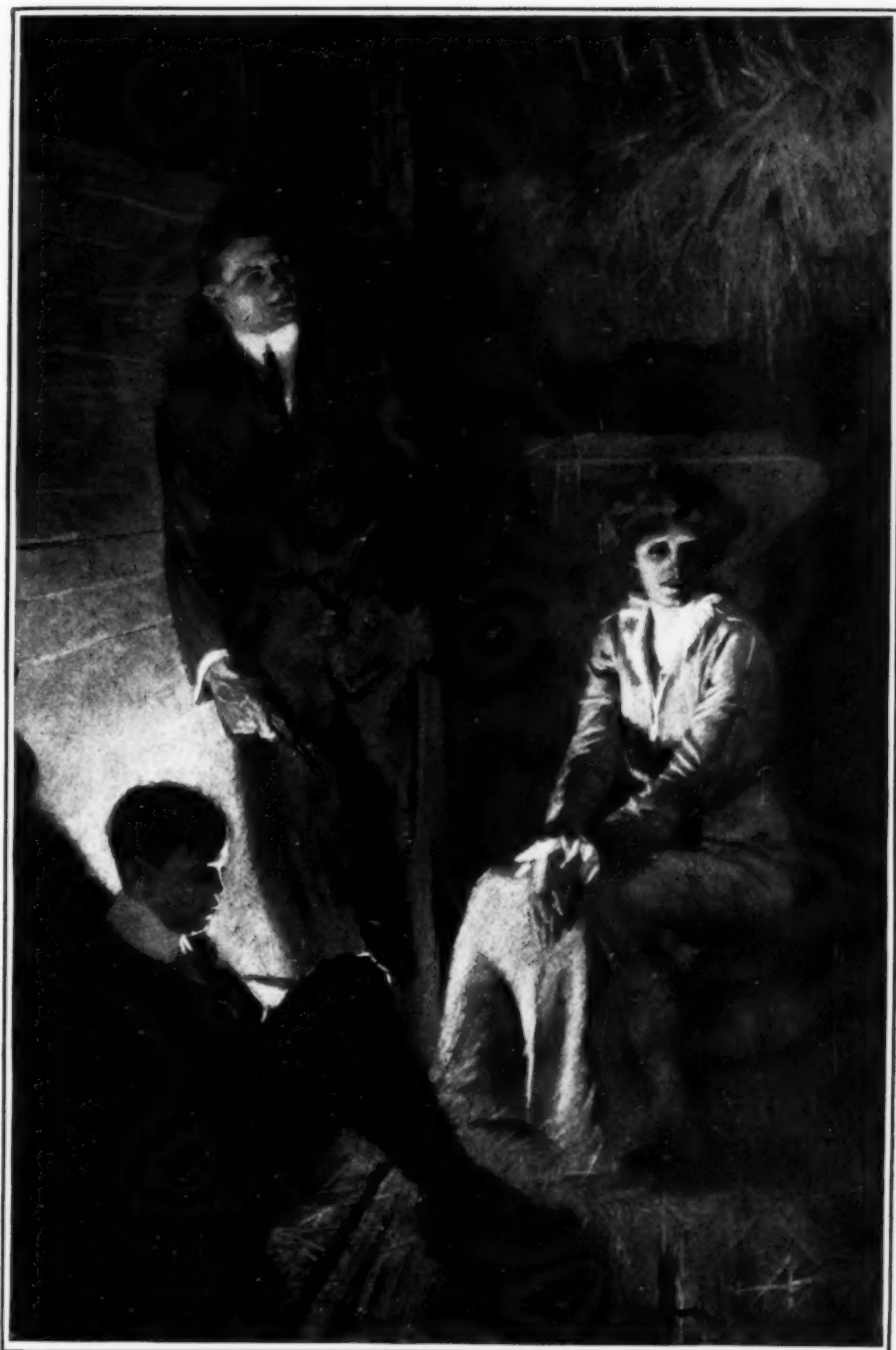
CONSIDERING the various handicaps under which he labored—notably a cold in the head, a fear of the Little Nugget, and a reverence for the aristocracy—Mr. Abney's handling of the situation, when the runaways returned to the school, bordered on the masterly.

Any sort of physical punishment being out of the question—especially in the case of the Nugget, who would certainly have retaliated with a bout of window-breaking—he had to fall back on oratory. He did this to such effect that, when he had finished, Augustus wept openly and was so subdued that he did not ask a single question for nearly three days.

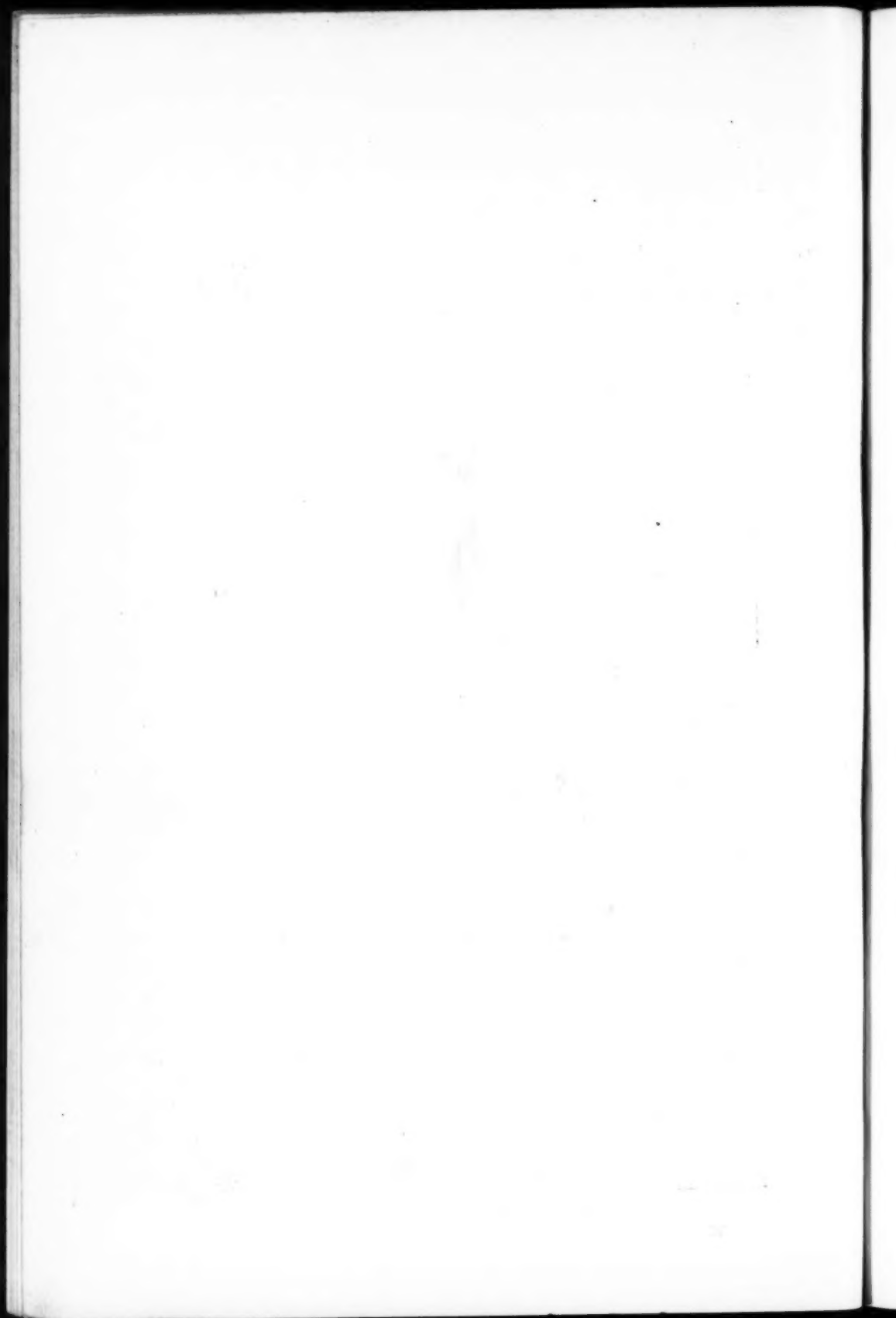
One result of the adventure was that Ogden's bed was moved to a sort of cubby-hole adjoining my room. In the house, as originally planned, this had evidently been a dressing-room. Under Mr. Abney's rule it had come to be used as a general repository for lumber. My boxes were there and a portmanteau of Glossop's.

It was an excellent place in which to bestow a boy in quest of whom kidnapers might break in by night. The window was too small to allow a man to pass through, and the only means of entrance was by way of my room. By night, at any rate, the Nugget's safety seemed to be assured.

The curiosity of the small boy, fortunately, is not lasting. His active mind lives mainly in the present. It was not many days, therefore, before the excitement caused by Buck's raid and the Nugget's disappearance began to subside.



"I DIDN'T HIT ANYBODY, BUT THEY RAN LIKE RABBITS!"



Within a week both episodes had been shelved as subjects of conversation, and the school had settled down to its normal, humdrum life.

To me, however, there had come a period of mental unrest more acute than I had ever experienced. For the past five years my life had run in so smooth a stream that now, when I found myself tossed about in the rapids, I was bewildered. It was a peculiar aggravation of the difficulty of my position that in my world, the little world of Sanstead House, there should be but one woman, and she the very one whom, if I wished to recover my peace of mind, it was necessary for me to avoid.

My feelings toward Cynthia at this time defied my powers of analysis. There were moments when I clung to the memory of her, when she seemed the only thing solid and safe in a world of chaos; and moments, again, when she was a burden, crushing me. There were days when I would give up the struggle and let myself drift; and days when I would fight myself inch by inch. But every day found my position more hopeless than the last.

At night sometimes, as I lay awake, I would tell myself that if only I could see her, or even hear from her, the struggle would be easier. It was her total disappearance from my life that made it so hard for me. I had nothing to help me to fight.

And then, one morning, as if in answer to my thoughts, her letter came.

The letter startled me. It was as if there had been some telepathic communion between us.

It was very short, almost formal:

MY DEAR PETER:

I want to ask you a question. I can put it quite shortly. It is this—are your feelings toward me still the same?

I don't tell you why I ask this. I simply ask it. Whatever your answer is, it cannot affect our friendship; so be quite candid.

CYNTHIA.

I sat down there and then to write my reply. Cynthia's letter, coming when it did and saying what it said, had affected me profoundly. It was like an unexpected reenforcement in a losing battle. It filled me with a glow of self-confidence. I felt strong again, able to fight and win. My mood bore me away, and I poured out my whole heart to her. I told her that my feelings had not altered, that I loved her and nobody but her.

It was a letter, I can see, looking back, born of fretted nerves; but at the time I had no such criticism to make. It seemed to me a commendably sincere expression of my real feelings.

That the fight was not over, however, simply because in my moment of exaltation I had imagined that I had conquered myself, was made uncomfortably plain to me by the thrill that ran through me when, returning from posting my letter, I met Audrey. The sight of her reminded me that a reenforcement is only a reenforcement, a help toward victory, not victory itself.

For the first time I found myself feeling resentful toward her. There was no reason in my resentment. It would not have borne examination; but it was there, and its presence gave me support.

I found myself combating the thrill the sight of Audrey had caused, and looking at her with a critical and hostile eye. Who was she that she should enslave a man against his will? Fascination exists only in the imagination of the fascinated individual. If he have the strength to deny the fascination and convince himself that it does not exist, he is saved. It is purely a matter of will-power and calm reasonableness. There must have been sturdy, level-headed Egyptian citizens who could not understand what other people saw to admire in Cleopatra.

Thus reasoning, I raised my hat, uttered a crisp "Good morning," and passed on, the very picture of the brisk man of affairs.

"Peter!"

Even the brisk man of affairs must stop when spoken to. Otherwise, apart from any question of politeness, it looks as if he were running away.

Her face was still wearing the faint look of surprise which my manner had called forth.

"You're in a great hurry."

I had no answer. She did not appear to expect one. We moved toward the house in silence—to me, oppressive silence. The force of her personality was beginning to beat against my defenses, concerning the stability of which, under pressure, a certain uneasiness troubled my mind.

"Are you worried about anything, Peter?" she said at last.

"No," I answered. "Why?"

"I was afraid you might be."

I felt angry with myself. I was mismanaging this thing in the most idiotic way. Instead of this bovine silence, my policy should have been gay small talk, the easy eloquence, in fact, of the brisk man of affairs. No wonder Smooth Sam Fisher treated me as a child! My whole bearing was that of a sulky schoolboy.

The silence became more oppressive. We reached the house. In the hall we parted, she to upper regions, I to my classroom. She did not look at me. Her face was cold and offended.

Man is a curiously inconsistent creature. Having created what in the circumstances was a most desirable coldness between Audrey and myself, I ought to have been satisfied. Reason told me that this was the best thing that could have happened; yet joy was one of the few emotions which I did not feel during the days which followed. My brief moment of clear-headedness had passed, and with it the exhilaration that had produced the letter to Cynthia and the resentment which had helped me to reason calmly with myself on the intrinsic nature of fascination in woman. Once more Audrey became the center of my world; but our friendship, that elusive thing which had contrived to exist side by side with my love, had vanished.

There was a breach between us which widened daily. Soon we hardly spoke when we met.

Nothing, in short, could have been more eminently satisfactory, and the fact that I regretted it is only a proof of the essential weakness of my character.

XXIII

In those gray days there was one thought, of the many that occupied my mind, which brought with it a certain measure of consolation. It was the reflection that this state of affairs could not last forever. The school term was drawing to a close. Soon I should be free from the propinquity which paralyzed my efforts to fight.

I was resolved that the last day of term should end forever my connection with Sanstead House and all that was in it. Mrs. Ford must find some other minion. If her happiness depended on the recovery of the Little Nugget, she must learn to do without happiness, like the rest of the inhabitants of this horrible world.

Meanwhile, however, I held myself to be still on duty. By what tortuous processes of thought I had arrived at the conclusion I do not know, but I considered myself responsible to Audrey for the safeguarding of the Little Nugget, and no altered relations between us could affect my position. Perhaps, mixed up with this attitude of mind, was the less altruistic wish to foil Smooth Sam. His continued presence at the school was a challenge to me.

Sam's behavior puzzled me. I do not know exactly what I expected him to do, but I certainly did not expect him to do nothing. Yet day followed day, and still he made no move.

He was the very model of a butler; but our dealings with each other in London had left me vigilant, and his temporary inaction did not disarm me. It sprang from patience, undoubtedly, not from any weakening of purpose or despair of success. Sooner or later, I knew, he would act, swiftly and suddenly, with a plan perfected in every detail.

Nevertheless, when he made his attack, it was the very simplicity of his methods that tricked me; and only pure chance defeated him.

I have said that it was the custom of the staff of masters at Sanstead House—in other words, of every male adult in the building except Mr. Fisher himself—to assemble in Mr. Abney's study after dinner of an evening to drink coffee. Like most of the daily events at an establishment such as a school, where things are run on a schedule, it was a ceremony which knew of no variation. Sometimes Mr. Abney would leave us immediately after the coffee-drinking, but he never omitted to take his part in it first.

On this particular evening, for the first time since the beginning of the term, I was seized with a prejudice against coffee. I had been sleeping badly for several nights, and I decided that abstention from coffee might remedy this.

I waited, for form's sake, till Glossop and Mr. Abney had filled their cups, then went to my room, where I lay down in the dark to wrestle with a more than usually pronounced fit of depression which had descended upon me. Solitude and darkness struck me as the suitable setting for my thoughts.

At this moment Smooth Sam Fisher had no place in my meditations. My mind was

not occupied with him at all. When, therefore, the door, which had been ajar, began to open slowly, I did not become instantly on the alert.

Perhaps it was some sound, barely audible, that aroused me from my torpor and set my blood tingling with anticipation. Perhaps it was the way the door was opening. An honest draft does not move a door furtively, in jerks.

I sat up noiselessly, tense and alert. And then, very quietly, somebody entered the room.

There was only one person in Sanstead House who would enter a room like that. I was amused. The impudence of the thing tickled me. It seemed so foreign to Mr. Fisher's usual cautious methods. This strolling in and helping oneself was certainly kidnaping *de luxe*. In the small hours I could have understood it; but at nine o'clock at night, with Glossop, Mr. Abney, and myself awake and liable to be met at any moment on the stairs, it was absurd. I marveled at Smooth Sam's effrontery.

I lay still. I imagined that, being in the room, he would switch on the electric light. He did, and I greeted him quite pleasantly.

"And what can I do for you, Mr. Fisher?"

For a man who must have learned to control himself in all sorts of difficult situations he took the shock badly. He uttered a startled exclamation, and spun round, open-mouthed.

I could not help admiring the quickness with which he recovered himself. Almost immediately he was once more the suave, chatty Sam Fisher who had so freely unbosomed his theories and dreams to me in the train to London.

"I quit," he said pleasantly. "The episode is closed. I am a man of peace, and I take it that you would not keep on lying quietly on that bed while I went into the other room and abstracted our young friend. Unless you have changed your mind again, would a fifty-fifty offer tempt you?"

"Not an inch!"

"Just so. I merely asked."

"And how about Mr. Abney, in any case? Suppose we met him on the stairs?"

"We should not meet him on the stairs," said Sam confidently. "You did not take coffee to-night, I gather?"

"I didn't; no. Why?"

He jerked his head resignedly.

"Can you beat it? I ask you, young man, could I have foreseen that, after drinking coffee every night regularly for two months, you would pass it up to-night of all nights? You certainly are my jinx, sonny. You have hung the Indian sign on me, all right!"

His words had brought light to me.

"Did you drug the coffee?"

"Did I? I fixed it so that one sip would have an insomnia-patient in dream-land before he had time to say 'Good night.' That stuff *Rip Van Winkle* drank had nothing on my coffee. And all wasted! Well, well!" He turned toward the door. "Shall I leave the light on, or would you prefer it off?"

"On, please. I might fall asleep in the dark."

"Not you! And, if you did, you would dream that I was there, and wake up. There are moments, young man, when you bring me pretty near to quitting and taking to honest work!" He paused. "But not altogether. I have still a shot or two in my locker. We shall see what we shall see. I am not dead yet. Wait!"

"I will, and some day, when I am walking along Piccadilly, a passing automobile will splash me with mud. A heavily furred plutocrat will stare haughtily at me from the limousine, and with a start of surprise I shall recognize—"

"Stranger things have happened," he said, without resenting my pleasantry. Be flip while you can, sonny. You win so far I admit, but this hoodoo of mine can't possibly last forever!"

He passed from the room with a certain dignity. A moment later he reappeared.

"A thought strikes me," he said. "The fifty-fifty proposition does not impress you. Would it make things easier if I were to offer my cooperation for a mere quarter of the profit?"

"Not in the least."

"It's a handsome offer."

"Wonderfully. I'm afraid I'm not dealing on any terms."

He left the room, only to return once more. His head appeared, staring at me round the door, in a disembodied way, like the *Cheshire Cat*.

"You won't say later on I didn't give you your chance?" he said anxiously.

He vanished again, permanently this

time. I heard his steps passing down the stairs.

XXIV

WE had now arrived at the last week of term, at the last days of the last week. The holiday spirit was abroad in the school. Among the boys it took the form of increased disorderliness. Boys who had hitherto only made Glossop bellow now made him perspire and tear his hair as well. Boys who had merely spilled ink now broke windows. The Little Nugget abandoned cigarettes in favor of an old clay pipe which he had found in the stables.

As for me, I felt like a spent swimmer who sees the shore almost within his reach. Audrey avoided me when she could, and was frigidly polite when we met; but I suffered less now. A few more days and I should have done with this phase of my life forever, and Audrey would once more become a memory.

Complete quiescence marked the deportment of Mr. Fisher during these days. He did not attempt to repeat his last effort. The coffee came to the study unmixed with alien drugs. Sam, like lightning, did not strike twice in the same place. He had the artist soul, and disliked patching up bungled work. If he made another move it would, I knew, be on entirely fresh lines.

Ignoring the fact that I had had all the luck, I was inclined to be self-satisfied when I thought of Sam. I had pitted my wits against his, and I had won. It was a praiseworthy performance for a man who had done hitherto nothing particular in his life.

If the copy-book maxims drilled into me in my childhood and my early disaster with Audrey had not been sufficient, I ought to have been warned by Sam's advice not to take victory for granted till the fight was over. As Sam had said, his luck would turn sooner or later.

One realizes these truths in theory, but the practical application of them seldom fails to come as a shock. I received mine on the last morning but one of the term.

Shortly after breakfast a message was brought to me that Mr. Abney would like to see me in his study. I went without any sense of disaster to come. Most of the business of the school was discussed in the study after breakfast, and I imagined that

the matter had to do with some detail of the morrow's exodus.

I found Mr. Abney pacing the room, a look of annoyance on his face. At the desk, her back to me, Audrey was writing. It was part of her work to take charge of the business correspondence of the establishment. She did not look round when I came in, nor when Mr. Abney spoke my name, but went on writing as if I did not exist.

There was a touch of embarrassment in Mr. Abney's manner, for which I could not at first account. He was stately, but with the rather defensive stateliness which marked his announcements that he was about to run up to London and leave me to do his work. He coughed once or twice before proceeding to business.

"Ah, Mr. Burns," he said at length. "Might I ask if your plans for the holidays, the—ah—earlier part of the holidays, are settled? No? Ah—excellent!"

He produced a letter from the heap of papers on the desk.

"Ah—excellent! That simplifies matters considerably. I have no right to ask what I am about to—ah—in fact, ask. I have no claim on your time in the holidays; but in the circumstances perhaps you may see your way to doing me a considerable service. I have received a letter from Mr. Elmer Ford, which puts me in a position of some difficulty. It is not my wish—indeed, it is foreign to my policy—to disoblige the parents of the boys who are entrusted to my—ah—care, and I should like, if possible, to do what Mr. Ford asks. It appears that certain business matters call him to the north of England for a few days, thus rendering it impossible for him to receive little Ogden tomorrow. It is not my custom to criticize parents who have paid me the compliment of placing their sons, at the most malleable and important period of their lives, in my—ah—charge, but I must say that a little longer notice would have been a—in fact, a convenience. But Mr. Ford, like so many of his countrymen, is what I believe is called a hustler. He does it now, as the expression is. In short, he wishes to leave little Ogden at the school for the first few days of the holidays, and I should be extremely obliged, Mr. Burns, if you could find it possible to stay here and—ah—look after him."

Audrey stopped writing and turned in

her chair, the first intimation she had given that she had heard Mr. Abney's remarks.

"It really won't be necessary to trouble Mr. Burns," she said, without looking at me. "I can take care of Ogden very well by myself."

"In the case of an—ah—ordinary boy, Mrs. Sheridan, I should not hesitate to leave you in sole charge, as you have very kindly offered to stay and help me in this matter. But we must recollect not only—I speak frankly—not only the peculiar—ah—disposition of this particular lad, but also the fact that those ruffians who visited the house that night may possibly seize the opportunity to make a fresh attack. I should not feel—ah—justified in thrusting so heavy a responsibility upon you."

There was reason in what he said. Audrey made no reply. I heard her pen tapping on the desk, and deduced her feelings. I myself felt like a prisoner who, having filed through the bars of his cell, is removed to another on the eve of escape. I had so braced myself up to endure till the end of term, and no longer, that this postponement of the day of release had a crushing effect.

Mr. Abney coughed and lowered his voice confidentially.

"I would stay myself, but the fact is I am called to London on very urgent business, and shall be unable to return for a day or so. My late pupil, the—ah—the Earl of Buxton, has been—I can rely on your discretion, Mr. Burns—has been in trouble with the authorities at Eton, and his guardian, an old college friend of mine, the—in fact, the Duke of Bessborough, who, rightly or wrongly, places—er—considerable reliance on my advice, is anxious to consult me on the matter. I shall return as soon as possible, but you will readily understand that, in the circumstances, my time will not be my own. I must place myself unreservedly at—ah—Bessborough's disposal."

He pressed the bell.

"In the event of your observing any suspicious characters in the neighborhood, you have the telephone and can instantly communicate with the police. And you will have the assistance of—"

The door opened and Smooth Sam Fisher entered.

"You rang, sir?"

"Ah! Come in, White, and close the door. I have something to say to you. I

have just been informing Mr. Burns that Mr. Ford has written asking me to allow his son to stay on at the school for the first few days of the vacation."

He turned to Audrey.

"You will doubtless be surprised, Mrs. Sheridan, and possibly—ah—somewhat startled, to learn the peculiar nature of White's position at Sanstead House. You have no objection to my informing Mrs. Sheridan, White, in consideration of the fact that you will be working together in this matter? Just so. White is a detective in the employment of Pinkerton's Agency. Mr. Ford—a slight frown appeared on his lofty brow—"Mr. Ford obtained his present situation for him in order that he might protect his son in the event of—ah—in fact, any attempt to remove him."

I saw Audrey start. A quick flush came into her face. She uttered a little exclamation of astonishment.

"Just so," said Mr. Abney, by way of comment on this. "You are naturally surprised. The whole arrangement is unusual and I may say—ah—disturbing. However, you have your duty to fulfil to your employer, White, and you will, of course, remain here with the boy."

"Yes, sir."

I found myself looking into a bright brown eye that gleamed with genial triumph. The other was closed. In the exuberance of the moment, Smooth Sam had had the bad taste to wink at me.

"You will have Mr. Burns to help you, White. He has kindly consented to postpone his departure during the short period in which I shall be compelled to be absent."

I had no recollection of having given any kind consent, but I was very willing to have it assumed; and I was glad to see that Mr. Fisher, though Mr. Abney did not observe it, was visibly taken aback by this piece of information. But he made one of his swift recoveries.

"It is very kind of Mr. Burns," he said in his fruitiest voice, "but I hardly think it will be necessary to put him to the inconvenience of altering his plans. I am sure that Mr. Ford would prefer the entire charge of the affair to be in my hands."

He had not chosen a happy moment for the introduction of the millionaire's name. Mr. Abney was a man of method, who hated any dislocation of the fixed routine of life; and Mr. Ford's letter had upset him. The Ford family, father and son,

were just then extremely unpopular with him. He crushed Sam.

"What Mr. Ford would or would not prefer is, in this particular matter, beside the point. The responsibility for the boy, while he remains on the school premises, is—ah—mine, and I shall take such precautions as seem fit and adequate to—h-m—myself, irrespective of those which, in your opinion, might suggest themselves to Mr. Ford. As I cannot be here myself, owing to—ah—urgent business in London, I shall certainly take advantage of Mr. Burns's kind offer to remain as my deputy."

Mr. Abney paused and blew his nose, his invariable custom after these occasional outbursts of his. Sam had not wilted beneath the storm. He waited, unmoved, till all was over.

"I am afraid I shall have to be more explicit," he said. "I had hoped to avoid scandal and unpleasantness, but I see it is impossible." Mr. Abney's astonished face emerged slowly from behind his handkerchief. "I quite agree with you, sir, that somebody should be here to help me look after the boy; but not Mr. Burns. I am sorry to have to say it, but I do not trust Mr. Burns."

Mr. Abney's look of astonishment deepened. I, too, was surprised. It was so unlike Sam to fling away his chances on a blundering attack like this.

"What do you mean?" demanded Mr. Abney.

"Mr. Burns is after the boy himself. He came here to kidnap him."

Mr. Abney, as he had every excuse for doing, grunted with amazement. I achieved the ringing laugh of amused innocence. It was beyond me to fathom Sam's mind. He could not suppose that any credence would be given to his wild assertion. It seemed to me that disappointment had caused him momentarily to lose his head.

"Are you mad, White?"

"No, sir. I can prove what I say. If I had not gone to London with him that last time, he'd have got away with the boy then for certain."

For an instant an uneasy thought came to me that he might have something in reserve, something unknown to me, which had encouraged him to this direct attack. I dismissed the notion. There could be nothing.

Mr. Abney had turned to me with a look of hopeless bewilderment. I raised my eyebrows.

"Ridiculous!" I said.

That this was the only comment seemed to be Mr. Abney's view. He turned on Sam with the pettish anger of the mild man.

"What do you mean, White, by coming to me with such a preposterous story?"

"I don't say Mr. Burns wished to kidnap the boy in the ordinary way," said Sam imperturbably, "like those men who came that night. He had a special reason. Mr. and Mrs. Ford, as of course you know, sir, are divorced. Mr. Burns was trying to get the boy away and take him back to his mother."

I heard Audrey give a little gasp. Mr. Abney's anger became modified by a touch of doubt. I could see that these words, by lifting the accusation from the wholly absurd to the somewhat plausible, had impressed him. Once again I was gripped by the uneasy feeling that Sam had an unsuspected card to play. This might be bluff, but it had a sinister ring.

"You might say," went on Sam smoothly, "that this was creditable to Mr. Burns's heart; but from my employer's view-point and yours, too, it was a chivalrous impulse that needed to be checked. Will you please read this, sir?"

He handed a letter to Mr. Abney, who adjusted his glasses, and began to read—at first in a detached, judicial way, then with startled eagerness.

"I regret to say that I felt it necessary to search among Mr. Burns's papers, sir, in the hope of finding—"

And then I knew what he had found. From the first the blue-gray note-paper had had a familiar look. I recognized it now. It was Cynthia's letter, that damning document which I had been mad enough to read to him in London. His prediction that the luck would change had come amazingly true.

I caught Sam's eye. For a second time he was unfeeling enough to wink. It was a rich, comprehensive wink, as expressive and joyous as a college yell.

Mr. Abney had absorbed the letter and was struggling for speech. I could appreciate his emotion. If he had not actually been nurturing a viper in his bosom, he had come, from his point of view, very near it. Of all men, a schoolmaster neces-

sarily looks with the heartiest dislike on the would-be kidnaper.

As for me, my mind was in a whirl. I was entirely without a plan, without the very beginnings of a plan, to help me cope with this appalling situation. I was crushed by a sense of the utter helplessness of my position. To denounce Sam was impossible; to explain my comparative innocence equally out of the question. The suddenness of the onslaught had deprived me of the power of coherent thought. I was routed.

Mr. Abney was speaking.

"Is your name Peter, Mr. Burns?"

I nodded. Speech was beyond me.

"This letter is written by—ah—by a lady. It asks you in set terms to—ah—hasten to kidnap Ogden Ford. Do you wish me to read it to you? Or do you confess to knowing its contents?"

He waited for a reply. I had none to make.

"You do not deny that you came to Sanstead House for the deliberate purpose of kidnaping Ogden Ford?"

I had nothing to say. I caught a glimpse of Audrey's face, cold and hard, and shifted my eyes quickly. Mr. Abney gulped. His face wore the reproachful expression of a codfish when jerked out of the water on the end of a line. He stared at me with pained repulsion. That scoundrelly old buccaneer, Sam, did the same. He looked like a shocked bishop.

"I—ah—trusted you implicitly," said Mr. Abney.

Sam wagged his head at me reproachfully. With a flicker of spirit I glared at him. He only wagged the more.

It was, I think, the blackest moment of my life. A wild desire for escape, on any terms, surged over me. That look on Audrey's face was biting into my brain like an acid.

"I will go and pack," I murmured feebly.

XXV

"THIS is the end of all things!" I said to myself.

I had suspended my packing in order to sit on my bed and brood. I was utterly depressed. There are crises in a man's life when reason fails to bring the slightest consolation.

In vain I tried to tell myself that what had happened was, in essence, precisely

what, twenty-four hours ago, I was so eager to bring about. It amounted to this, that now at last Audrey had definitely gone out of my life. From now on I could have no relations with her of any sort. Was not this exactly what, twenty-four hours ago, I had wished? Twenty-four hours ago, had I not said to myself that I would go away and never see her again? Undoubtedly. Nevertheless, I sat there and groaned in spirit.

It was the end of all things.

A mild voice interrupted my meditations.

"Can I help?" Sam was standing in the doorway, beaming on me with invincible good humor. "You are handling them wrong. Allow me! A moment more and you would have ruined the crease."

I became aware of a pair of trousers hanging limply in my grasp. He took them from me, and, folding them neatly, placed them in my trunk.

"Don't get all worked up about it, sonny," he said. "It's the fortune of war. Besides, what does it matter to you? Judging by that very snug apartment in London, you have quite enough money for a young man. Losing your job here won't break you. And, if you're worrying about Mrs. Ford and her feelings, don't! I guess she's probably forgotten all about the Nugget by this time. So cheer up. You're all right!"

He stretched out a hand to pat me on the shoulder, then thought better of it and drew it back.

"Think of my happiness, if you want something to make you feel good. Believe me, young man, it's *some*. I could sing! Gee, when I think that it's all plain sailing now and no more troubles, I could dance! You don't know what it means to me, putting through this deal. I wish you knew Mary! That's her name. You must come and visit us, sonny, when we're fixed up in the home. There'll always be a knife and fork for you. We'll make you one of the family! Lord, I can see the place as plain as I can see you! Nice frame house with a good porch; me in a rocker in my shirt-sleeves, smoking a cigar and reading the baseball news; Mary in another rocker, mending my socks and nursing the cat! We'll sure have a cat. Two cats! I like cats. And a goat in the front garden. Say, it'll be *great*!"

And on the word, emotion overcoming prudence, he brought his fat hand down

with a resounding smack on my bowed shoulders.

There is a limit. I bounded to my feet.

"Get out!" I yelled. "Get out of here!"

"Sure," he replied agreeably. He rose without haste, and regarded me compassionately. "Cheer up, son! Be a sport!"

There are moments when the best of men become melodramatic. I offer this as excuse for my next observation. Clenching my fists and glaring at him, I cried:

"I'll foil you yet, you hound!"

Some people have no soul for the dramatic. He smiled tolerantly.

"Sure," he said. "Anything you like, Desperate Desmond! Enjoy yourself!"

And he left me.

I evacuated Sanstead House unostentatiously, setting off on foot down the long drive. My luggage, I gathered, was to follow me to the station in a cart. I was thankful to Providence for the small mercy that the boys were in their class-rooms, and consequently unable to ask me questions. Augustus Beckford alone would have handled the subject of my premature exit in a manner calculated to bleach my hair.

It was a wonderful morning. The sky was an unclouded blue, and a fresh breeze was blowing in from the sea. I think that something of the exhilaration of approaching spring must have stirred me, for quite suddenly the dull depression with which I had started my walk left me, and I found myself alert and full of schemes.

Why should I feebly withdraw from the struggle? Why should I give in to Smooth Sam in this tame way? The memory of that wink came back to me with a tonic effect. I would show him that I was still a factor in the game. If the school was closed to me, was there not the Feathers? I could lie in hiding there, and observe his movements unseen.

I stopped on reaching the inn, and was on the point of entering and taking up my position at once, when it occurred to me that this would be a false move. It was possible that Sam would not take my departure for granted so readily as I assumed. It was Sam's way to do a thing thoroughly, and the probability was that, if he did not actually come to see me off, he would at least make careful inquiries at the station to find out if I had gone. I walked on.

He was not at the station. Nor did he arrive in the cart with my trunk. But I was resolved to risk nothing. I bought a ticket for London and boarded the London train. It had been my intention to leave it at Guildford and catch an afternoon train back to Sanstead; but it seemed to me, on reflection, that this was unnecessary. There was no likelihood of Sam making any move in the matter of the Nugget until the following day. I could take my time about returning.

I spent the night in London, and arrived at Sanstead by an early morning train with a suit-case containing, among other things, a Browning pistol.

I was a little ashamed of this purchase. To the Buck MacGinnis type of man, I suppose, a pistol is as commonplace a possession as a pair of shoes, but I blushed as I entered the gun-shop. If it had been Buck with whom I was about to deal, I should have felt less self-conscious. But there was something about Sam which made pistols ridiculous.

My first act, after engaging a room at the inn and leaving my suit-case, was to walk to the school. Before doing anything else, I felt I must see Audrey and tell her the facts in the case of Smooth Sam. If she were on her guard, my assistance might not be needed; but her present state of trust in him was fatal.

A school, when the boys are away, is a lonely place. The deserted air of the grounds, as I slipped cautiously through the trees, was almost eerie. A stillness brooded over everything, as if the place had been laid under a spell. Never before had I been so impressed with the isolation of Sanstead House. Anything might happen in this lonely spot, and the world would go on its way in ignorance.

It was with quite distinct relief that, as I drew nearer the house, I caught sight of the telephone-wire among the trees above my head. It had a practical, comforting look.

A tradesman's cart rattled up the drive and disappeared round the side of the house. This reminder, also, of the outside world was pleasant; but I could not rid myself of the feeling that the atmosphere of the place was sinister. I attributed it to the fact that I was a spy in an enemy's country. I had to see without being seen. I did not imagine that Johnson, the grocer, who had just passed in his cart, found

anything wrong with the atmosphere. It was created for me by my own furtive attitude.

Of Audrey and Ogden there were no signs. That they were out somewhere in the grounds this mellow spring morning I took for granted; but I could not make an extended search. Already I had come nearer to the house than was prudent.

My eye caught the telephone-wire again, and an idea came to me. I would call her up from the inn and ask her to meet me. There was the risk that the call would be answered by Smooth Sam, but it was not great. Sam, unless he had thrown off his rôle of butler completely—which would be unlike the artist that he was—would be in the housekeeper's room, and the ringing of the telephone, which was in the study, would not penetrate to him.

I chose a moment when dinner was likely to be over and Audrey might be expected to be in the drawing-room.

I had deduced her movements correctly. It was her voice that answered the call.

"This is Peter Burns speaking."

There was a perceptible pause before she replied. When she did, her voice was cold.

"Yes?"

"I want to speak to you on a matter of urgent importance."

"Well?"

"I can't do it through the telephone. Will you meet me in half an hour's time at the gate?"

"Where are you speaking from?"

"The Feathers. I am staying there."

"I thought you were in London."

"I came back. Will you meet me?"

She hesitated.

"Why?"

"Because I have something important to say to you—important to you."

There was another pause.

"Very well."

"In half an hour, then. Is Ogden Ford in bed?"

"Yes."

"Is his door locked?"

"No."

"Then lock it, and bring the key with you."

"Why?"

"I will tell you when we meet."

"I will bring it."

"Thank you. Good-by!"

I hung up the receiver and set out at once for the school. She was waiting in

the road, a small, indistinct figure in the darkness.

"Is that you—Peter?"

Her voice had hesitated at the name, as if at some obstacle. It was a trivial thing, but in my present mood it stung me.

"I'm afraid I'm late. I won't keep you long. Shall we walk down the road? You may not have been followed, but it is as well to be on the safe side."

"Followed? I don't understand."

We walked a few paces, and halted.

"Who would follow me?"

"A very eminent person of the name of Smooth Sam Fisher."

"Smooth Sam Fisher?"

"Better known to you as White."

"I don't understand."

"I should be surprised if you did. I asked you to meet me here so that I could make you understand. The man who poses as a Pinkerton detective, and who is staying in the house to help you take care of Ogden Ford, is Smooth Sam Fisher, a professional kidnaper."

"But—but—"

"But what proof have I? Was that what you were going to say? None. But I had the information from the man himself. He told me in the train that night going to London."

She spoke quickly. I knew from her tone that she thought she had detected a flaw in my story.

"Why did he tell you?"

"Because he needed me as an accomplice. He wanted my help. It was I who got Ogden away that day. Sam overheard me giving money and directions to him, telling him how to get away from the school and where to go, and he gathered—correctly—that I was in the same line of business as himself. He suggested a partnership, which I was unable to accept."

"Why?"

"Our objects were different. My motive in kidnapping Ogden was not to extract a ransom."

She blazed out at me in an absolutely unexpected manner. Till now she had listened so calmly and asked her questions with such notable absence of emotion that the outburst overwhelmed me.

"Oh, I know what your motive was! There is no need to explain that. Isn't there any depth to which a man who thinks himself in love won't stoop? I suppose you told yourself you were doing something

noble and chivalrous. A woman of her sort can trick a man into whatever meanness she pleases, and, just because she asks him, he thinks himself a kind of knight errant! I suppose she told you that he had ill-treated her, and didn't appreciate her higher self, and all that sort of thing. She looked at you with those big brown eyes of hers—I can see her—and drooped, and cried, till you were ready to do anything she asked you!"

"Whom do you mean?"

"Mrs. Ford, of course—the woman who sent you here to steal Ogden—the woman who wrote you that letter."

"She did not write that letter. But never mind that. The reason why I wanted you to come here was to warn you against Sam Fisher. That was all. If there is any way in which I can help you, send for me. If you like, I will come and stay at the house till Mr. Abney returns."

Before the words were out of my mouth I saw that I had made a mistake. The balance of her mind was poised between suspicion and belief, and my offer turned the scale.

"No, thank you," she said curtly.

"You don't trust me?"

"Why should I? White may or may not be Sam Fisher. I shall be on my guard, and I thank you for telling me. But why should I trust you? It all hangs together. You told me you were engaged to be married. You come here on an errand which no man would undertake except for a woman, and a woman with whom he was very much in love. There is that letter, signed with Mrs. Ford's initial, imploring you to steal the boy. I know what a man will do for a woman he is fond of. Why should I trust you?"

"There is this. You forget that I had the opportunity to steal Ogden if I had wanted to. I had got him away to London; but I brought him back. I did it because you had told me what it meant to you."

She hesitated, but only for an instant. Suspicion was too strong for her.

"I don't believe you. You brought him back because this man whom you call Fisher got to know of your plans. Why should you have done it because of me? Why should you have put my interests before Mrs. Ford's? I am nothing to you."

For a moment a mad impulse seized me to cast away all restraint, to pour out all the unspoken words that danced like imps

in my brain, to make her understand, whatever the cost, my feelings toward her. But the thought of my letter to Cynthia checked me. That letter had been the irrevocable step. If I was to preserve a shred of self-respect, I must be silent.

"Very well," I said. "Good night"; and I turned to go.

"Peter!" There was something in her voice which whirled me round, thrilling, despite my resolution. "Are you going?"

Weakness now would be my undoing. I steadied myself, and answered somewhat abruptly.

"I have said all I came to say. Good night."

I turned once more and walked quickly off toward the village. I came near to running. I was in the mood when flight alone can save a man. She did not speak again, and soon I was out of danger, hurrying on through the friendly darkness, beyond the reach of her voice.

The bright light from the doorway of the Feathers was the only illumination that relieved the blackness of the Market Square. As I approached, a man came out and stopped in the entrance to light a cigar. His back was turned toward me as he crouched to protect the match from the breeze, but something in his appearance seemed familiar.

I had only a glimpse of him as he straightened himself and walked out of the pool of light into the square, but it was enough.

It was my much-enduring acquaintance, Mr. Buck MacGinnis.

XXVI

At the receipt of custom behind the bar sat Miss Benjafield, stately as ever, relaxing her massive mind over a penny novelette.

"Who was the man who just left, Miss Benjafield?" I asked.

She marked the place with a shapely thumb and looked up.

"The man? Oh, *him!* He's—why, weren't you in here, Mr. Burns, one evening in January when—"

"That American?"

"That's him. What he's doing here I don't know. He disappeared quite a while back, and I haven't seen him since, nor wanted to. To-night up he turns again like a bad ha'penny. I'd like to know

what he's after. No good, I'll warrant, if you ask *me!*"

Miss Benjafield's prejudices did not easily dissolve. She prided herself, as she frequently observed, on knowing her own mind.

"Is he staying here?"

"Not at the Feathers. We're particular who we have here."

I thanked her for the implied compliment, ordered something for the good of the house, and, lighting a pipe, sat down to meditate on this new development.

The vultures were gathered together with a vengeance! Sam within, Buck without, it was quite like old times, with the difference that now I, too, was on the wrong side of the school door.

It was not hard to account for Buck's reappearance. He would, of course, have made it his business to get early information of Mr. Ford's movements. It would be easy for him to discover that the millionaire had been called away to the north, and that the Nugget was still an inmate of Sanstead House. And here he was, preparing for the grand attack.

I had been premature in removing Buck's name from the list of active combatants. Broken legs mend. I ought to have remembered that.

His presence on the scene made, I perceived, a vast difference to my plan of campaign. It was at this point that my purchase of the Browning pistol lost its absurdity and appeared in the light of an acute strategic move. With Sam the only menace, I had been prepared to play a purely waiting game, watching proceedings from afar, ready to give my help if necessary. To check Buck, more strenuous methods were called for.

My mind was made up. With Buck, that stout disciple of the frontal attack, in the field, there was only one place for me. I must get into Sanstead House and stay there on guard.

Did he intend to make an offensive movement to-night? That was the question which occupied my mind. From the point of view of an opponent, there was this merit about Mr. MacGinnis, that he was not subtle. He could be counted on with fair certainty to do the direct thing. Sooner or later he would make another of his vigorous frontal attacks upon the stronghold. The only point to be decided was whether he would make it that night.

Would professional zeal cause him to omit his beauty sleep?

I did not relish the idea of spending the night patrolling the grounds, but it was imperative that the house should be protected. Then it occurred to me that the man for the vigil was Smooth Sam.

If the arrival of Mr. MacGinnis had complicated matters in one way, it had simplified them in another, for there was no more need for the secrecy which had been, till now, the basis of my plan of action. Buck's arrival made it possible for me to come out and fight in the open, instead of brooding over Sanstead House from afar. To-morrow I proposed to turn Sam out. To-night I would use him. The thing had resolved itself into a triangular tournament, and Sam and Buck should play the first game.

Once more I called up the school on the telephone. There was a long delay before a reply came. It was Mr. Fisher's voice that spoke. Audrey, apparently, had not returned to the house immediately after leaving me.

"Hello" said Sam.

"Good evening, Mr. Fisher."

"Gee! Is that you, young fellow? Are you speaking from London?"

"No. I am at the Feathers."

He chuckled richly.

"Can't tear yourself away? Hat still in the ring? Say, what's the use? Why not turn it up, sonny? You're only wasting your time."

"Do you sleep lightly, Mr. Fisher?"

"I don't get you."

"You had better do so to-night. Buck MacGinnis is back again."

There was silence at the other end of the wire. Then I heard him swear softly. The significance of the information had not been lost on Mr. Fisher.

"Is that straight?"

"It is."

"You're not stringing me?"

"Certainly not."

"You're sure it was Buck?"

"Is Buck's the sort of face one forgets?"

He swore again.

"You seem disturbed," I said.

"Where did you see him?" asked Sam.

"Coming out of the Feathers, looking very fierce and determined. The blood of the MacGinnises is up. He's going to do or die. I'm afraid this means an all-night sitting for you, Mr. Fisher!"

"I thought you had put him out of business!"

There was a somewhat querulous note in his voice.

"Only temporarily. I did my best, but he wasn't even limping when I saw him."

Sam did not speak for a moment. I gathered that he was pondering over the new development.

"Thanks for tipping me off, sonny. It's a thing worth knowing. Why did you do it?"

"Because I love you, Samuel. Good night!"

I rose late and breakfasted at my leisure. The peace of the English country inn enveloped me as I tilted back my chair and smoked the first pipe of the morning.

It was a day to hearten a man for great deeds, one of those days of premature summer which come sometimes to help us bear the chill winds of early spring. The sun streamed in through the open window. In the yard below some chickens made their soothing music. The thought of violence seemed very alien to such a morning.

I strolled out into the square. I was in no hurry to end this interlude of peace and embark on what, for all practical purposes, would be a siege.

After lunch, I decided, would be time enough to begin active campaigning.

The clock on the church tower was striking two as I set forth, carrying my suit-case, on my way to the school. The light-heartedness of the morning still lingered with me. I was amused at the thought of the surprise I was about to give Mr. Fisher. That wink still rankled.

As I made my way through the grounds I saw Audrey in the distance walking with the Nugget. I avoided them and went on into the house.

About the building there was the same air of enchanted quiet which pervaded the grounds. Perhaps the stillness indoors was even more insistent. I had grown so accustomed to the never-ending noise and bustle of the boys' quarters that, as I crossed the silent hall, I had an almost guilty sense of intrusion. I felt like a burglar.

Sam, the object of my visit, would, I imagined, if he were in the house at all, be in the housekeeper's room, a cozy little apartment off the passage leading to the kitchen. I decided to draw that first, and

was rewarded, on pushing open the half-closed door, by the sight of a pair of black-trousered legs stretched out before me from the depths of a wickerwork armchair.

Sam's portly middle section, rising beyond like a small hill, heaved rhythmically. His face was covered with a silk handkerchief, from beneath which came, in even succession, faint and comfortable snores. It was a peaceful picture—the good man taking his rest; and for me it had an added attractiveness in that it suggested that Sam was doing by day what my information had prevented him from doing in the night. It had been some small consolation to me, as I lay trying to compose my anxious mind for sleep on the previous night, that Mr. Fisher also was keeping his vigil.

Pleasing as Sam was as a study in still life, pressure of business compelled me to stir him into activity. I prodded him gently in the center of the rising territory beyond the black trousers.

He grunted discontentedly and sat up. The handkerchief fell from his face and he blinked at me, at first with the dazed glassiness of the newly awakened, then with a "Soul's Awakening" expression, which spread over his face until it melted into a friendly smile.

"Hello, young man!"

"Good afternoon. You seem tired."

He yawned cavernously.

"Lord! What a night!"

"Did Buck drop in?"

"No, but I thought he had every time I heard a board creak. I didn't dare close my eyes for a minute. Have you ever stayed awake all night, waiting for the goblins that get you if you don't watch out? Well, take it from me, young man, it's no picnic!"

His face split in another mammoth yawn. He threw his heart into it, as if life held no other tasks for him. Only in alligators have I ever seen its equal.

I waited till the seismic upheaval had spent itself. Then I came to business.

"I'm sorry you had a disturbed night, Mr. Fisher. You must make up for it this afternoon. You will find the beds very comfortable."

"How's that?"

"At the Feathers. I should go there, if I were you. The charges are quite reasonable and the food is good. You will like the Feathers."

"I don't get you, sonny."

"I was trying to break it gently to you that you are about to move from this house—now—at once. Take your last glimpse of the old home, Sam, and out into the hard world!"

He looked at me inquiringly.

"You seem to be talking, young man. Words appear to be fluttering from you; but your meaning, if any, escapes me."

"My meaning is that I am about to turn you out. I am coming back here, and there is not room for both of us. So, if you do not see your way to going quietly, I shall take you by the back of the neck and run you out. Do I make myself fairly clear now?"

He permitted himself a rich chuckle.

"You have gall, young man. Well, I hate to seem unfriendly—I like you, sonny. You amuse me; but there are moments when one wants to be alone. I have a whole heap of arrears of sleep to make up. Trot along, kiddo, and quit disturbing uncle. Tie a string to yourself and disappear. By-by!"

The wickerwork creaked as he settled his stout body. He picked up the handkerchief.

"Mr. Fisher," I said, "I have no wish to propel your gray hairs at a rapid run down the drive, so I will explain further. I am physically stronger than you. I mean to turn you out. How can you prevent it? Mr. Abney is away. You can't appeal to him. The police are at the end of the telephone, but you can't appeal to them. So what *can* you do, except go? Do you get me now?"

He regarded the situation in thoughtful silence. He allowed no emotion to find expression in his face, but I knew that the significance of my remarks had sunk in. I could almost follow his mind, as he tested my position point by point, and found it impregnable.

When he spoke it was to accept defeat jauntily.

"You *are* my jinx, young man! I said it all along. You're really set on my going? Say no more. I'll go. After all, it's quiet at the inn, and what more does a man want at my time of life?"

I went out into the garden to interview Audrey.

She was walking up and down on the tennis-lawn. The Nugget, lounging in a deck chair, appeared to be asleep.

She caught sight of me as I came out from the belt of trees, and stopped. I had

the trying experience of walking across open country under hostile observation; but the routing of Sam had left me alert and self-confident, and I felt no embarrassment.

I greeted her briskly.

"Good afternoon. I have been talking to Sam Fisher. If you wait, you will see him passing away down the drive. He is leaving the house. I am coming back."

"Coming back?"

She spoke incredulously, or, rather, as if my words had conveyed no meaning. It was so that Sam had spoken. Her mind, like his, took time to adjust itself to the unexpected.

She seemed to awake to my meaning with a start.

"Coming back?" Her eyes widened. The flush deepened on her cheeks. "But I told you—"

"I know what you told me. You said you did not trust me. It doesn't matter. I am coming back whether you trust me or not. This house is under martial law, and I am in command. The situation has changed since I spoke to you last night. Last night I was ready to let you have your way. I intended to keep an eye on things from the inn. But it's different now. It is not a case of Sam Fisher any longer. You could have managed Sam. It's Buck MacGinnis now—the man who came that night in the automobile. I saw him in the village after I left you. He's dangerous."

She looked away, past me, in the direction of the drive. I followed her gaze. A stout figure, carrying a suit-case, was moving slowly down it.

I smiled. Her eyes met mine; and I saw the anger that had been lying at the back of them flash out. Her chin went up with the old defiant tilt. I was sorry I had smiled. It was my old fault, the complacency that would not be hidden.

"I don't believe you!" she cried. "I don't trust you!"

It is curious how one's motive for embarking on a course of conduct changes or disappears altogether as the action develops. Once started on an enterprise it is as if one proceeded with it automatically, irrespective of one's original motives.

I had begun what I might call the second phase of this matter of the Little Nugget—the abandoning of Cynthia's cause in favor of Audrey's—with a clear idea of why I was doing it. I had set myself to resist the various forces that were

trying to take Ogden from Audrey, for one simple reason — because I loved her and wished to help her. That motive, if it still existed at all, did so only in the form of abstract chivalry. My personal feelings toward her seemed to have undergone a complete change, dating from our parting in the road the night before.

I found myself now meeting hostility with hostility. I looked at her critically and told myself that her spell was broken at last; that, if she disliked me, I was at least indifferent to her.

And yet, despite my altered feelings, my determination to help her never wavered. The guarding of Ogden might be — primarily — no business of mine; but I had adopted it as my business.

"I don't ask you to trust me," I said. "We have settled all that. There's no need to go over old ground. Think what you please about this. I've made up my mind."

"If you mean to stay, I suppose I can't prevent you!"

"Exactly."

Sam appeared again in a gap in the trees, walking slowly and pensively, as one retreating from his Moscow. Her eyes followed him till he was out of sight.

"If you like," I said bitterly, "you may put what I am doing down to professional rivalry. If I am in love with Mrs. Ford and am here to steal Ogden for her, it is natural for me to do all I can to prevent Buck MacGinnis getting him. There is no need for you to look on me as an ally because we are working together."

"We are not working together."

"We shall be in a very short time. Buck will not let another night go by without doing something."

"I don't believe that you saw him."

"Just as you please," I said, and walked away. What did it matter to me what she believed?

The day dragged on. Toward evening the weather broke suddenly, after the fashion of spring in England. Showers of rain drove me to the study.

It must have been nearly ten o'clock when the telephone rang. It was Mr. Fisher.

"Hello, is that you, sonny?"

"It is. Do you want anything?"

"I want a talk with you. Business! Can I come up?"

"If you wish it."

"I'll start right away."

It was some fifteen minutes later that I heard in the distance the engine of an automobile. The headlights gleamed through the trees; and presently the car swept round the bend of the drive and drew up at the front door. A portly figure got down and rang the bell.

I observed these things from a window on the first floor, overlooking the front steps; and it was from this window that I spoke.

"Is that you, Mr. Fisher?"

He backed away from the door.

"Where are you?"

"Is that your car?"

"It belongs to a friend of mine."

"I didn't know you meant to bring a party."

"There's only three of us — me, the chauffeur, and my friend MacGinnis."

The possibility — indeed, the probability — of Sam seeking out Buck and forming an alliance had occurred to me, and I was prepared for it. I shifted my grip on the automatic pistol in my hand.

"Mr. Fisher!"

"Hello?"

"Ask your friend MacGinnis to be good enough to step into the light of that lamp and drop his gun."

There was a muttered conversation. I heard Buck's voice rumbling like a train going under a bridge. The request did not appear to find favor with him. Then came an interlude of soothing speech from Mr. Fisher. I could not distinguish the words, but I gathered that he was pointing out to Buck that, on this occasion only, the visit being for purposes of parley and not of attack, pistols might be looked on as non-essentials.

Whatever his arguments, they were successful, for finally, humped as to the back and muttering, Buck moved into the light.

"Good evening, Mr. MacGinnis," I said.

"I'm glad to see your leg is all right again. I won't detain you a moment. Just feel in your pockets and shed a few of your guns, and then you can come in out of the rain. To prevent any misunderstanding, I may say I have a gun of my own. It is trained on you now."

"I ain't got no gun."

"Come along! This is no time for airy persiflage. Out with them."

A moment's hesitation, and a small black pistol fell to the ground.

"No more?"

"Think I'm a regiment?"

"I don't know what you are. Well, I'll take your word for it. You will come in one by one with your hands up."

I went down and opened the door, holding my pistol in readiness against the unexpected.

XXVII

SAM came first. His raised hands gave him a vaguely pontifical air—"Bishop Blessing Pilgrims"—and the kindly smile he wore heightened the illusion. Mr. MacGinnis, who followed, suggested no such idea. He was muttering moodily to himself, and he eyed me askance.

I showed them into the class-room and switched on the light. The air was full of many odors. Disuse seems to bring out the inky-chalky-appley bouquet of a class-room as night brings out the scent of flowers. During the term I had never known this class-room smell so exactly like a class-room. I made use of my free hand to secure and light a cigarette.

Sam rose to a point of order.

"Young man," he said, "I should like to remind you that we are here, as it were, under a flag of truce. To pull a gun on us and keep us holding our hands up this way is raw work. I feel sure I speak for my friend, Mr. MacGinnis."

He cocked an eye at his friend Mr. MacGinnis, who seconded the motion by expectorating into the fireplace. I had observed at a previous interview his peculiar gift for laying bare his soul by means of this mode of expression. A man of silent habit, judged by the more conventional standard of words, he was almost an orator in exhortation.

"Mr. MacGinnis agrees with me," said Sam cheerfully. "Do we take them down? Have we your permission to assume the second position of these Swedish exercises? All we came for was a little friendly chat among gentlemen, and we can talk just as well—speaking for myself, better—in a less strained attitude. A little rest. Mr. Burns? A little folding of the hands? Thank you."

He did not wait for permission; nor was it necessary. Sam and the melodramatic atmosphere were as oil and water. It was impossible to blend them. I laid the pistol on the table and sat down. Buck, after one wistful glance at the weapon, did the same. Sam was already seated, and was

looking so cozy and so much at home that I almost felt it remiss of me not to have provided sherry and cake for this pleasant gathering.

"Well?" I said. "What can I do for you?"

"Let me explain," said Sam. "As you have no doubt gathered, Mr. MacGinnis and I have gone into partnership—the Little Nugget Combine!"

"I gathered that. Well?"

"Judicious partnerships are the soul of business. Mr. MacGinnis and I have been rivals in the past, but we both saw that the moment had come for the genial smile, the hearty hand-shake—in fact, for an alliance. We form a strong team, sonny. My partner's specialty is action; I supply the strategy. Say, can't you see you're up against it? Why be foolish?"

"You think you're certain to win?"

"It's a cinch."

"Then why trouble to come here and see me?"

I appeared to have put into words the smoldering thought which was vexing Mr. MacGinnis. He burst into speech.

"Ah, gee! Sure! What's de use? Didn't I tell youse? What's de use of wastin' time? What are we spelin' away here for? Let's get busy!"

Sam waved a hand toward him with the air of a lecturer making a point.

"You see—the man of action! He likes trouble. He asks for it. He eats it alive. Now I prefer peace. Why have a fuss when you can get what you want quietly? That's my motto. That's why we've come. It's the old proposition. We're here to buy you out. Yes, I know you have turned the offer down before, but things have changed. Your stock has fallen. In fact, instead of letting you in on sharing terms, we can only offer you a commission now. For the moment you may seem to hold a strong position. You are in the house and you've got the boy. But there's nothing to it really. We could get him in five minutes if we cared to risk having a fuss. It seems to me there's no need of any fuss. Of course, we should win dead easy, all right, if it came to trouble; but, on the other hand, you've a gun and there's a chance some of us might get hurt, so what's the good of a scrap when we can settle it quietly? How about it, sonny?"

Mr. MacGinnis began to rumble, preparatory to making further remarks on the

situation, but Sam waved him down and turned his brown eyes inquiringly on me.

"Fifteen per cent is our offer," he said.

"And to think it was once fifty-fifty!"

"Strict business!"

"Business? It's sweating!"

"It's our limit. It wasn't easy to make Buck here agree to that. He kicked like a mule."

Buck shuffled his feet and eyed me disagreeably. I suppose it is hard to think kindly of a man who has broken your leg. It was plain that with Mr. MacGinnis by-gones were by no means by-gones.

I rose.

"Well, I'm sorry you should have had the trouble of coming here for nothing. Let me see you out. Single file, please!"

Sam looked aggrieved.

"You turn it down?"

"I do."

"One moment. Let's have this thing clear. Do you realize what you're up against? Don't think it's only Buck and me you've got to tackle. All the boys are here, waiting round the corner, the same gang that came the other time. Be sensible, sonny! You don't stand a dog's chance. I shouldn't like to see you get hurt; and you never know what may not happen. The boys are pretty sore at you because of what you did that night. I shouldn't act like a bonehead, sonny—honest!"

There was a kindly ring in Sam's voice which rather touched me. Between him and me there had sprung up an odd sort of friendship. He meant business; but he would, I knew, be genuinely sorry if I came to harm. I could see that he was quite sincere in his belief that I was in a tight corner, and that my chances against the combine were infinitesimal. I imagine that, with victory so apparently certain, he had had difficulty in persuading his allies to allow him to make his offer.

But he had overlooked one thing—the telephone. That he should have made this mistake surprised me. If it had been Buck, I could have understood it. Buck's was a mind which lent itself to such blunders. From Sam I had expected better things, especially as the telephone had been so much in evidence of late. He had used it himself only half an hour ago.

I clung to the thought of the telephone. It gave me the quiet satisfaction of the gambler who holds the unforeseen ace. The situation was in my hands. The police, I

knew, had been profoundly stirred by Mr. MacGinnis's previous raid. When I called them up, as I proposed to do directly the door had closed on the ambassadors, there would be no lack of response. It would not again be a case of Inspector Bones and Constable Johnson to the rescue. An army of willing helpers would swoop to our help.

With these thought in my mind, I answered Sam pleasantly but firmly.

"I'm sorry I'm unpopular, but all the same—"

I indicated the door.

Emotion that could only be expressed in words and not through his usual medium welled up in Mr. MacGinnis. He sprang forward with a snarl, falling back as my faithful automatic caught his eye.

"Say, you! Listen here! You'll—"

Sam, the peaceable, plucked at his elbow.

"Nothing doing, Buck! Step lively."

Buck wavered, then allowed himself to be drawn away. We passed out of the class-room in our order of entry.

An exclamation from the stairs made me look up. Audrey was leaning over the banisters. Her face was in the shadow, but I gathered from her voice that the sight of our little procession had startled her.

I was not surprised. Buck was a distinctly startling spectacle, and his habit of growling to himself, as he walked, was highly disturbing to strangers.

"Good evening, Mrs. Sheridan," said Sam suavely.

Audrey did not speak. She seemed fascinated by Buck.

I opened the front door, and they passed out. The automobile was still purring on the drive. Buck's pistol had disappeared. I suppose the chauffeur had picked it up, a surmise which was proved correct a few moments later, when, just as the car was moving off, there was a sharp crack, and a bullet struck the wall near the door.

It was a random shot, and I did not return it. Its effect on me was to send me into the hall with a leap that was almost a back-somersault. Somehow, though I was keyed up for violence and the shooting of pistols, I had not expected it at just that moment, and I was disagreeably surprised at the shock it gave me.

I slammed the door and bolted it. I was intensely irritated to find that my fingers were trembling.

Audrey had left the stairs and was standing beside me.

"They shot at me," I said. By the light of the hall lamp I could see that she was very pale. "It missed by a mile." My nerves had not recovered, and I spoke abruptly. "Don't be frightened!"

"I—I was not frightened," she said, without conviction.

"I was," I said, with conviction. "It was too sudden for me. It's the sort of thing one wants to get used to gradually. I shall be ready for it another time."

I made for the stairs.

"Where are you going?" she asked.

"I'm going to call up the police station."

"Peter!"

"Yes?"

"Was—that was that ugly man the one you spoke of?"

"Yes, that was Buck MacGinnis. He and Sam have gone into partnership."

She hesitated.

"I'm sorry," she said.

I was half-way up the stairs by this time. I stopped and looked over the banisters.

"Sorry?"

"I didn't believe you this afternoon."

"Oh, that's all right," I said. I tried to make my voice indifferent, for I was on guard against insidious friendliness. I had bludgeoned my mind into an attitude of safe hostility toward her, and I saw the old chaos ahead if I allowed myself to abandon it.

I went to the telephone and unhooked the receiver.

XXVIII

THERE is apt to be a certain leisureliness about the methods of country telephone-operators, and the fact that a voice did not immediately ask me what number I wanted did not at first disturb me. Suspicion of the truth came to me, I think, after my third shout into the transmitter had remained unanswered. I had suffered from delay before, but never such delay as this.

I must have remained there fully two minutes, shouting at intervals, before I realized the truth. Then I dropped the receiver from my hand and leaned limply against the wall.

For the moment I was as stunned as if I had received a blow. I could not even think. It was only by degrees that I recovered sufficiently to understand that Audrey was speaking to me.

"What? 't? Don't they answer?"

It is curious how the mind responds to the need of making an effort for the sake of somebody else. If I had had only myself to think of, it would, I believe, have been a considerable time before I could have adjusted my thoughts to grapple with this disaster; but the necessity of conveying the truth quietly to Audrey and of helping her to bear up under it steadied me at once. I found myself thinking quite coolly how best I might break to her what had happened.

"I'm afraid," I said, "I have something to tell you which may—"

She interrupted me quickly.

"What is it? Can't you make them answer?"

I shook my head. We looked at each other in silence. Her mind leaped to the truth more quickly than mine had done.

"They have cut the wire!"

I took up the transmitter again and gave another call. There was no reply.

"I'm afraid so," I said.

"What shall we do?" said Audrey.

She looked at me hopefully, as if I were a mine of ideas. Her voice was level, without a suggestion of fear in it. Women have the gift of being courageous at times when they might legitimately give way. It is part of their unexpectedness.

This was certainly such an occasion. Daylight would bring us relief, for I did not suppose that even Buck MacGinnis would care to conduct a siege which might be interrupted by the arrival of tradesmen's carts; but while the darkness lasted we were completely cut off from the world. With the destruction of the telephone-wire our only link with civilization had been snapped. Even had the night been less stormy than it was, there was no chance of the noise of our warfare reaching the ears of any one who might come to the rescue. It was as Sam had said—Buck's energy united to his strategy formed a strong combination.

Broadly speaking, there are only two courses open to a beleaguered garrison. It can stay where it is, or it can make a sortie. I considered the second of these courses.

It was possible that Sam and his allies had departed in the automobile to get reinforcements, leaving the coast temporarily clear; in which case, by escaping from the house at once, we might be able to slip unobserved through the grounds and reach the village in safety.

To support this theory, there was the fact that the car, on its late visit, had contained only the chauffeur and the two ambassadors, while Sam had spoken of the remainder of Buck's gang as being in readiness to attack in the event of my not coming to terms. That might mean that they were waiting at Buck's headquarters, wherever those might be—at one of the cottages down the road, I imagined; and, in the interval before the attack began, it might be possible for us to make our sortie with success.

"Is Ogden in bed?" I asked.

"Yes."

"Will you go and get him up as quickly as you can?"

I strained my eyes at the window, but it was impossible to see anything. The rain was still falling heavily. If the drive had been full of men, they would have been invisible to me.

Presently Audrey returned, followed by Ogden. The Little Nugget was yawning the aggrieved yawns of one roused from his beauty sleep.

"What's all this?" he demanded.

"Listen," I said. "Buck MacGinnis and Smooth Sam Fisher have come after you. They are outside now. Don't be frightened."

He snorted derisively.

"Who's frightened? I guess they won't hurt *me*. How do you know it's them?"

"They have just been here. The man who called himself White, the butler, was really Sam Fisher. He has been waiting an opportunity to get you all the term."

"White! Was he Sam Fisher?" He chuckled admiringly. "Say, he's a wonder!"

"They have gone to fetch the rest of the gang."

"Why don't you call the cops?"

"They have cut the wire."

His only emotion at the news seemed to be amusement and a renewed admiration for Smooth Sam. He smiled broadly, the little brute!

"He's a wonder!" he repeated. "I guess he's smooth, all right. He's the limit! He'll get me this trip. I bet you a nickel he wins out!"

I found his attitude trying. That he, the cause of all the trouble, should be so obviously regarding it as a sporting contest got up for his entertainment, was hard to bear. And the fact that, whatever might

happen to myself, he was in no danger, comforted me not at all. If I could have felt that we were in any way companions in peril, I might have looked on the bulbous boy with quite a friendly eye. As it was, I nearly kicked him.

"We had better waste no time," suggested Audrey, "if we are going."

"I think we ought to try it," I said.

"What's that?" asked the Nugget. "Go where?"

"We are going to steal out through the back way and try to slip through to the village."

The Nugget's comment on the scheme was brief and to the point. He did not embarrass me with fulsome praise of my strategic genius.

"Of all the fool games!" he said simply. "In this rain? No, sir!"

This new complication was too much for me. In planning out my maneuvers I had taken his cooperation for granted. I had looked on him as so much baggage—the impedimenta of the retreating army; and behold, a mutineer!

I took him by the scruff of the neck and shook him. It was a relief to my feelings and a sound move. The argument was one which he understood.

"Oh, all right!" he said. "Anything you like. Come on; but it sounds to me like darned foolishness!"

If nothing else had happened to spoil the success of that sortie, the Nugget's depressing attitude would have done so. Of all things, it seems to me, a forlorn hope should be undertaken with a certain enthusiasm and optimism, if it is to have a chance of being successful. Ogden threw a gloom over the proceedings from the start. He was cross and sleepy, and he condemned the expedition unequivocally.

As we moved toward the back door he kept up a running stream of abusive comment. I silenced him before unbolting the door, but he had said enough to damp my spirits. I do not know what effect it would have had on Napoleon's tactics if his army—say, before Austerlitz—had spoken of his maneuvers as a "fool game" and of himself as a "big chump," but I doubt if it would have stimulated him.

The back door of Sanstead House opened upon a narrow yard paved with flagstones and shut in on all sides but one by walls. To the left was the outhouse, where the coal was stored—a squat, barnlike building; to

the right, a wall that appeared to have been erected by the architect in an outburst of pure whimsicality. It just stood there. It served no purpose that I had ever been able to discover, except to act as a cats' clubhouse.

To-night, however, I was thankful for this wall. It formed an important piece of cover. By keeping in its shelter it was possible to work round the angle of the coal-shed, enter the stable-yard, and, by making a *détour* across the football field, avoid the drive altogether. And it was the drive, in my opinion, that might be looked on as the danger zone.

The Nugget's complaints, which I had momentarily succeeded in checking, burst out afresh as the rain swept in at the opened door and lashed our faces. Certainly it was not an ideal night for a ramble. The wind was blowing through the opening at the end of the yard with a compressed violence due to the confined space. There was a suggestion in our position of the Cave of the Winds under Niagara Falls, the verisimilitude of which was increased by the stream of water that poured down from the gutter above our heads. The Nugget found it unpleasant, and said so shrilly.

I pushed him out into the storm, still protesting, and we began to creep across the yard. Half-way to the first point of importance of our journey, the corner of the coal-shed, I halted the expedition. There was a sudden lull in the wind, and I took advantage of it to listen.

From somewhere beyond the wall, apparently near the house, sounded the muffled note of the automobile. The siege-party had returned.

XXIX

THERE was no time to be lost. Apparently the possibility of a sortie had not yet occurred to Sam, or he would hardly have left the back door unguarded; but a general of his astuteness was certain to remedy the mistake soon, and our freedom of action might be a thing of moments. We must reach the stable-yard as quickly as possible. Once there, we should be practically through the enemy's lines.

Administering a kick to the Nugget, who showed a disposition to linger and talk about the weather, I moved on, and we reached the corner of the coal-shed in safety.

We had now arrived at the really perilous stage in our journey. Having built his wall to a point level with the end of the coal-shed, the architect had apparently wearied of the thing and given it up, for it ceased abruptly, leaving us with a matter of half a dozen yards of open ground to cross, with nothing to screen us from the watchers on the drive.

The flagstones, moreover, stopped at this point. On the open space was loose gravel. Even if the darkness allowed us to make the crossing unseen, there was the risk that we might be heard.

It was a moment for a flash of inspiration, and I was waiting for one, when that happened which took the problem out of my hands. From the interior of the shed on our left there came a sudden scrambling of feet over loose coal, and through the square opening in the wall, designed for the peaceful purpose of taking in sacks, climbed two men.

A pistol cracked. From the drive came an answering shout. We had been ambushed.

I had misjudged Sam. He had not overlooked the possibility of a sortie.

It is the accidents of life that turn the scale in a crisis. The opening through which the men had leaped was scarcely a couple of yards behind the spot where we were standing. If they had leaped fairly and kept their feet, they would have been on us before we could have moved. But fortune ordered it that, zeal outrunning discretion, the first of the two should catch his foot in the woodwork and fall on all fours, while the second, unable to check his spring, alighted on top of him, and, judging from the stifled yell which followed, must have kicked him in the face.

In the moment of their downfall I was able to form a plan and execute it.

"The stables!"

I shouted the words to Audrey in the act of snatching up the Nugget, and starting to run.

She understood. She did not hesitate in the direction of the house for even the instant which might have undone us, but was with me at once; and we were across the open space and in the stable-yard before the first of the men in the drive loomed up through the darkness.

Half of the double wooden gate of the yard was open; the other half served us as a shield. They fired as they ran—at ran-

dom, I think, for it was too dark for them to have seen us clearly—and two bullets slapped against the gate. A third struck the wall above our heads and ricocheted off into the night.

Before they could fire again we were in the stables, the door slammed behind us, and I had dumped the Nugget on the floor, and was shooting the heavy bolts into their places. Footsteps clattered over the flagstones and stopped outside. Some weighty body plunged against the door. Then there was silence. The first round was over.

The stables, as is the case in most English country houses, had been the glory of Sanstead House in its palmy days. In whatever other respect the British architect of that period may have fallen short, he never scamped his work on the stables. He built them strong and solid, with walls fitted to repel the assaults of the weather, and possibly those of men as well. The Boones, in their day, had been mighty owners of race-horses at a time when men with money at stake did not stick at trifles, and it was prudent to see to it that the spot where the favorite was housed had something of the nature of a fortress. The walls were thick, the door solid, the windows barred with iron. We could scarcely have found a better haven of refuge.

Under Mr. Abney's rule, the stables had lost their original character. They had been divided into three compartments, each separated by a stout wall. One compartment became a gymnasium, another the carpenter's shop; the third, in which we were, remained a stable, though in these degenerate days no horse ever set hoof inside it, its only use being to provide a place for the odd-job man to clean shoes. The mangers which had once held fodder were given over now to brushes and pots of polish. In term-time bicycles were stored in the loose-box which had once echoed to the trampling of Derby favorites.

I groped about among the pots and brushes, and found a candle-end, which I lit. I was running a risk, but it was necessary to inspect our ground. I had never troubled to examine this stable before, and I wished to put myself in touch with its geography.

I blew out the candle, well content with what I had seen. The only two windows were small, high up, and excellently barred. Even if the enemy fired through them there

were half a dozen spots where we should be perfectly safe.

Best of all, in the event of the door being carried by assault, we had a second line of defense in a loft. A ladder against the back wall led to it, by way of a trap-door. Circumstances had certainly been kind to us in driving us to this apparently impregnable shelter.

On concluding my inspection I became aware that the Nugget was still occupied with his grievances. I think the shots must have stimulated his nerve-centers, for he had abandoned the languid drawl with which, in happier moments, he was wont to comment on life's happenings, and was dealing with the situation with a staccato briskness.

"Of all the darn fool layouts I ever struck, this is the limit! What do those idiots think they're doing, shooting us up that way? It went within an inch of my head. It might have killed me. Gee, and I'm all wet! It's all through your blamed foolishness, bringing us out here. Why couldn't we stay in the house?"

"We could not have kept them out of the house for five minutes," I explained. "We can hold this place."

"Who wants to hold it? I don't. What does it matter if they do get me? I don't care. I've a good mind to walk straight out through that door and let them rope me in. It would serve dad right. It would teach him not to send me away from home to any old school again. What did he want to do it for? I was all right where I was I—"

A loud hammering on the door cut off his eloquence. The intermission was over and the second round had begun.

It was pitch-dark in the stable now that I had blown out the candle, and there is something about a combination of noise and darkness which tries the nerves. If mine had remained steady, I should have ignored the hammering. From the sound, it appeared to be made by some wooden instrument—a mallet from the carpenter's shop, I discovered later—and the door could be trusted on to hold its own without my intervention.

For a novice to violence, however, to maintain a state of calm inaction is the most difficult feat of all. I was irritated and worried by the noise, and I exaggerated its importance. It seemed to me that it must be stopped at once.

A moment before I had bruised my shins against an empty packing-case, which had found its way with other lumber into the stable. I groped for this, swung it noiselessly into position beneath the window, and, standing on it, looked out.

I found the catch of the window and opened it. There was nothing to be seen, but the sound of the hammering became more distinct; and, pushing an arm through the bars, I emptied my pistol at a venture.

As a practical move, the action had flaws, for the shots cannot have gone anywhere near their vague target; but as a demonstration it was a wonderful success. The yard became suddenly full of dancing bullets. They struck the flagstones, bounded off, chipped the bricks of the far wall, ricocheted from those, buzzed in all directions, and generally behaved in a manner calculated to unman the stoutest-hearted.

The siege-party did not stop to argue—they stamped as one man. I could hear them clattering across the flagstones to every point of the compass. In a few seconds silence prevailed, broken only by the swish of the rain. Round two had been brief, hardly worthy to be called a round at all, and, like round one, it had ended wholly in our favor.

I jumped down from my packing-case, swelling with pride. I had had no previous experience of this sort of thing, yet here I was handling the affair like a veteran. I considered that I had a right to feel triumphant.

I lit the candle again and beamed protectively upon the garrison. The Nugget was sitting on the floor, gaping feebly and awed for the moment into silence. Audrey looked pale but composed. Her behavior was perfect. There was nothing for her to do, and she was doing it with a quiet self-control which won my admiration. Her manner seemed to me exactly suited to the exigencies of the situation. With a super-competent daredevil like myself in charge of affairs, all she had to do was to wait and not get in the way.

"I didn't hit anybody," I announced, "but they ran like rabbits. They are all over Hampshire!"

I laughed indulgently. I could afford an attitude of tolerant amusement toward the enemy.

"Will they come back?" she asked.

"Possibly. And in that case"—I felt in my left-hand coat-pocket—"I had better

be getting ready." I felt in my right-hand coat-pocket. "Ready," I repeated blankly.

A clammy coldness took possession of me. My voice trailed off into nothingness. For in neither pocket was there a single one of the shells with which I had fancied that I was abundantly provided.

In moments of excitement man is apt to make mistakes. I had made mine when, starting out on the sortie, I had left all my ammunition in the house.

XXX

I SHOULD like to think that it was an unselfish desire to spare my companions anxiety that made me keep my discovery to myself; but I am afraid that my reticence was due far more to the fact that I shrank from letting the Nugget discover my imbecile carelessness. Even in times of peril one retains one's human weaknesses; and I felt that I could not face his comments. If he had permitted a certain note of querulousness to creep into his conversation already, imagination recoiled from the thought of the caustic depths he would reach now should I reveal the truth.

I tried to make things better with cheery optimism.

"They won't come back!" I said stoutly, and tried to believe it.

The Nugget, as usual, struck the jarring note.

"Well, then, let's beat it," he said. "I don't want to spend the night in this darned ice-house. I tell you I'm catching cold. My chest's weak. If you're so dead certain you've scared them away, let's quit."

I was not prepared to go as far as this.

"They may be somewhere near, hiding."

"Well, what if they are? I don't mind being kidnapped. Let's go."

"I think we ought to wait," said Audrey.

"Of course," I said. "It would be madness to go out now."

"Oh, pshaw!" said the Little Nugget; and from this point onward he punctuated the proceedings with a hacking cough.

I had never really believed that my demonstration had brought the siege to a definite end. I anticipated that there would be some delay before the renewal of hostilities, but I was too well acquainted with Buck MacGinnis's tenacity to imagine that he would abandon his task because a few random shots had spread momentary panic in his ranks. He had all the night before him, and sooner or later he would return.

I had judged him correctly. Many minutes dragged wearily by without a sign from the enemy. Then, listening at the window, I heard footsteps crossing the yard and voices talking in cautious undertones. The fight was on once more.

A bright light streamed through the window, flooding the opening and spreading in a wide circle on the ceiling. It was not difficult to understand what had happened. They had gone to the automobile and come back with one of the head-lamps—an astute move in which I seemed to see the finger of Sam.

The danger-spot thus rendered harmless, they renewed their attack on the door with a reckless vigor. The mallet had been superseded by some heavier instrument—of iron, this time. I think it must have been the jack from the automobile. It was a more formidable weapon altogether than the mallet, and even our good oak door quivered under it.

A splintering of wood decided me that the time had come to retreat to our second line of entrenchments. How long the door would hold it was impossible to say, but I doubted if it would be more than a matter of minutes.

Relighting my candle, which I had extinguished from motives of economy, I caught Audrey's eye and jerked my head toward the ladder.

"You go first," I whispered.

The Nugget watched her disappear through the trap-door, then turned to me with an air of resolution.

"If you think you're going to get me up there you've another guess coming! I'm going to wait here till they get in, and let them take me. I'm about tired of this foolishness!"

It was no time for verbal argument. I collected him, a kicking handful, bore him to the ladder, and pushed him through the opening. He uttered one of his devastating squeals.

The sound seemed to encourage the workers outside like a trumpet-blast. The blows on the door redoubled.

I climbed the ladder and shut the trap-door behind me. The air of the loft was close and musty and smelled of mildewed hay. It was not the sort of spot which one would have selected of one's own free will to sit in for any length of time. There was a rustling noise, and a rat scurried across the rickety floor, drawing a startled

gasp from Audrey, and a disgusted "Oh, piffle!" from the Nugget.

Whatever merits this final refuge might have as a stronghold, it was beyond question a noisome place.

The beating on the stable-door was working up to a crescendo. Presently there came a crash that shook the floor on which we sat and sent our neighbors, the rats, scuttling to and fro in a perfect frenzy of perturbation.

The light of the automobile-lamp poured in through the numerous holes and chinks which the passage of time had made in the old boards. There was one large hole near the center which produced a sort of search-light effect, and allowed us for the first time to see what manner of place it was in which we had entrenched ourselves. The loft was high and spacious. The roof must have been some seven feet above our heads. I could stand upright without difficulty.

In the proceedings beneath us there had come a lull. The mystery of our disappearance had not baffled the enemy for long, for almost immediately the rays of the lamp had shifted and began to play on the trap-door. I heard somebody climb the ladder, and the trap-door creaked gently as a hand tested it. I had taken up a position beside it, ready, if the bolt gave way, to do what I could with the butt of my pistol, my only weapon; but the bolt, though rusty, was strong, and the man dropped to the ground again. Since then, except for occasional snatches of whispered conversation. I had heard nothing.

Suddenly Sam's voice spoke.

"Mr. Burns!"

"I saw no advantage in remaining silent.

"Well?"

"Haven't you had enough of this? You've given us a mighty good run for our money, but you can see for yourself that you're through now. I'd hate like anything for you to get hurt. Pass the kid down and we'll call it off."

He paused.

"Well?" he said. "Why don't you answer?"

"I did."

"Did you? I didn't hear you."

"I smiled."

"You mean to stick it out? Don't be foolish, sonny! The boys here are mad enough at you already. What's the use of getting yourself in bad for nothing? We've got you in a pocket. I know all

about that gun of yours, young fellow. I had a suspicion what had happened, and I've been into the house and found the shells you forgot to take with you. So, if you were thinking of making a bluff in that direction, forget it!"

The exposure had the effect I had anticipated.

"Of all the chumps!" exclaimed the Nugget caustically. "You ought to be in a home. Well, I guess you'll agree to end this foolishness now. Let's go down and get it over and have some peace. I'm getting pneumonia!"

"You're quite right, Mr. Fisher," I said; "but don't forget I still have the pistol, even if I haven't the shells. The first man who tries to come up here will have a headache to-morrow."

"I shouldn't bank on it, sonny. Come along, kiddo! You're done. Be good, and own it. We can't wait much longer."

"You'll have to try."

Buck's voice broke in on the discussion, quite unintelligible except that it was obviously wrathful.

"Oh, well!" I heard Sam say resignedly, and then there was silence again below.

I resumed my watch over the trap-door, encouraged. This parleying, I thought, was an admission of failure on the part of the besiegers. I did not credit Sam with a real concern for my welfare—thereby doing him an injustice. I can see now that he spoke sincerely. The position, though I was unaware of it, really was hopeless, for the reason that, like most positions, it had a flank as well as a front.

In estimating the possibilities of attack, I had figured assaults as coming only from below. I had omitted from my calculations the fact that the loft had a roof.

It was a scraping on the tiles above my head that first brought the new danger-point to my notice. There followed the sound of heavy hammering, and with it came a sickening realization of the truth of what Sam had said. We were beaten!

I was too utterly paralyzed by the unexpectedness of the attack to form any plan; and indeed I do not think that there was anything that I could have done. I was unarmed and helpless. I stood there, waiting for the inevitable.

Affairs moved swiftly. Plaster rained down upon the wooden floor. I was vaguely aware that the Nugget was speaking, but I did not listen to him.

A gap appeared in the roof and widened. I could hear the heavy breathing of the man as he wrenched at the tiles.

And then the climax arrived, with anticlimax following so swiftly upon it that the two were almost simultaneous. I saw the worker on the roof cautiously poise himself in the opening, hunched up like some strange ape. The next moment he had sprung.

As his feet touched the floor there came a rending, splintering crash; the air was filled with a choking dust, and he was gone. The old, worn-out boards had shaken under my tread. They had given way in complete ruin beneath this heavy onslaught. The rays of the lamp, which had filtered in little pencils of light through crevices, now shone in a great lake in the center of the floor.

In the stable below all was confusion. Everybody was speaking at once. The hero of the late disaster was groaning horribly, for which he certainly had good reason. I did not know the extent of his injuries, but a man does have such a fall with impunity.

The next of the strange happenings of the night now occurred.

I had not been giving the Nugget a great deal of my attention for some time, other and more urgent matters occupying me. His action at this juncture consequently came as a complete and crushing surprise.

I was edging my way cautiously toward the jagged hole in the center of the floor, in the hope of seeing something of what was going on below, when from close beside me his voice screamed: "It's me—Ogden Ford! I'm coming!"

Without further warning he ran to the hole, swung himself over, and dropped.

Manna falling from the skies in the wilderness never received a more whole-hearted welcome. Howls and cheers and ear-splitting whoops filled the air. The babel of talk broke out again. Some exuberant person found expression for his joy by emptying his pistol at the ceiling—to my acute discomfort, the spot he had selected as a target chancing to be within a foot of where I stood. Then they moved off in a body, still cheering.

The fight was over.

I do not know how long it was before I spoke. It may have been some minutes. I was dazed with the swiftness with which the final stages of the drama had been

played out. If I had given him more of my attention, I might have divined that Ogden had been waiting his opportunity to make some such move; but, as it was, the possibility had not even occurred to me, and I was stunned.

In the distance I heard the automobile moving off down the drive. The sound roused me.

"Well, we may as well go," I said dully.

I lit the candle and held it up. Audrey was standing against the wall, her face white and set.

I raised the trap-door and followed her down the ladder.

The rain had ceased and the stars were shining. After the closeness of the loft, the clean, wet air was delicious. For a moment we stopped, held by the peace and stillness of the night. Then, quite suddenly, she broke down.

It was the unexpectedness of it that first threw me off my balance. In all the time I had known her I had never before seen Audrey in tears. Always, in the past, she had borne the blows of fate with a stoical indifference which had alternately attracted and repelled me, according as my mood led me to regard it as courage or insensibility.

In the old days it had done much, this trait of hers, to rear a barrier between us. It had made her seem aloof and unapproachable. Subconsciously, I suppose, it had offended my egoism that she should be able to support herself in times of trouble and not feel it necessary to lean on me.

But now the barrier had fallen. The old independence, the almost aggressive self-reliance, had vanished. A new Audrey had revealed herself.

She was sobbing helplessly, standing quite still, her arms hanging and her eyes staring blankly before her. There was something in her attitude so hopeless, so beaten, that the pathos of it seemed to cut me like a knife.

"Audrey!"

The stars glittered in the little pools among the worn flagstones. The night was very still. Only the steady drip of water from the trees broke the silence.

A great wave of tenderness seemed to sweep from my mind everything in the world but her. Everything broke abruptly that had been checking me, stifling me, holding me gagged and bound since the night when our lives had come together

again after those five long years. I forgot Cynthia, my promise, everything.

"Audrey!"

She was in my arms, clinging to me, murmuring my name. The darkness was about us like a cloud. And then she had slipped from me and was gone.

XXXI

In my recollections of that strange night there are wide gaps. Trivial incidents come back to me with extraordinary vividness, while there are hours of which I can remember nothing. What I did or where I went I cannot recall.

It seems to me, looking back, that I walked without a pause till morning; yet, when day came, I was still in the school grounds. Perhaps I walked, as a wounded animal runs, in circles. I know that I lost all count of time. I became aware of the dawn as something that had happened suddenly, as if light had succeeded darkness in a flash. It had been night: I looked about me and it was day—a steely, cheerless day, like a December evening. And I found that I was very cold, tired, and miserable.

My mind was like the morning, gray and overcast. Conscience may be expelled, but, like nature, it will return. Mine, which I had cast from me, had crept back with the daylight. I had had my hour of freedom, and it was now for me to pay for it.

I paid in full. My thoughts tore me. I could see no way out. Through the night the fever and exhilaration of that mad moment had sustained me; but now the morning had come, when dreams must yield to facts, and I had to face the future.

I sat on the stump of a tree and buried my face in my hands. I must have fallen asleep, for when I raised my eyes again the day was brighter. Its cheerlessness had gone. The sky was blue and birds were singing.

It must have been about half an hour later that the first beginnings of a plan of action came to me. I could not trust myself to reason out my position clearly and honestly in this place where Audrey's spell was over everything. The part of me that was struggling to be loyal to Cynthia was overwhelmed here. London called to me. I could think there, face my position quietly, and make up my mind.

I turned to walk to the station. I could not guess even remotely what time it was. The sun was shining through the trees, but

in the road outside the grounds there were no signs of workers beginning the day.

It was half past five when I reached the station. A sleepy porter informed me that there would be a train to London, a slow train, at six.

I remained in London two days, and on the third went down to Sanstead to see Audrey for the last time. I had made my decision.

I found her on the drive, close by the gate. She turned at my footstep on the gravel; and, as I saw her, I knew that the fight which I had thought over was only beginning.

I was shocked at her appearance. Her face was very pale and there were tired lines about her eyes.

I could not speak. Something choked me. Once again, as on that night in the stable-yard, the world and all that was in it seemed infinitely remote. It was she who broke the silence.

"Well, Peter?" she said listlessly.

We walked up the drive together.

"Have you been to London?" she inquired.

"Yes. I came down this morning." I paused. "I went there to think."

She nodded.

"I have been thinking, too," she said.

I stopped, and began to hollow out a groove in the wet gravel with my heel. Words were not coming readily.

Suddenly she found speech. She spoke quickly, but her voice was dull and lifeless.

"Let us forget what has happened, Peter. We were neither of us ourselves. I was tired and frightened and disappointed. You were sorry for me just at the moment, and your nerves were strained, like mine. It was all nothing. Let us forget it."

I shook my head.

"No," I said, "it was not that. I can't let you even pretend you think that was all. I love you! I always have loved you, though I did not know how much till you had gone away. After a time I thought I had got over it; but when I met you again down here I knew that I had not, and never should. I came back to say good-by, but I shall always love you. It is my punishment for being the sort of man I was five years ago."

"And mine for being the sort of woman I was five years ago." She laughed bitterly. "Woman! I was just a little fool, a

sulky child. My punishment is going to be worse than yours, Peter. You will not always be thinking that you had the happiness of two lives in your hands, and threw it away because you had not the sense to hold it!"

"That is just what I shall always be thinking. What happened five years ago was my fault, Audrey, and nobody's but mine. Even when the loss of you hurt most, I don't think I ever blamed you for going away. You had made me see myself as I was, and I knew that you had done the right thing. I was selfish, patronizing, insufferable. It was I who threw away our happiness. You put it in a sentence that first day here when you said that I had been kind—sometimes, when I happened to think of it. That summed me up. You have nothing to reproach yourself for. I think we have not had the best of luck; but all the blame is mine."

A flush came into her pale face.

"I remember saying that. I said it because I was afraid of myself. I was shaken by meeting you again. I thought you must be hating me—you had every reason to hate me, and you spoke as if you did—and I did not want to show you what you were to me. It wasn't true, Peter! Five years ago I may have thought it, but not now. I have grown to understand the realities by this time. I have been through too much to have any false ideas left. I have had some chance to compare men, and I realize that they are not all kind, Peter, even sometimes, when they happen to think of it."

"Audrey," I said—I had never found myself able to ask the question before—"tell me, was—was he—was Sheridan kind to you?"

She did not speak for a moment, and I thought she was resenting the question.

"No!" she said abruptly.

She shot out the monosyllable with a force that startled and silenced me. There was a whole history of unhappiness in the word.

"No," she said again, after a pause, more gently this time.

I understood. She was speaking of a dead man.

"I can't talk about him," she went on hurriedly. "I expect most of it was my fault. I was unhappy because he was not you, and he saw that I was unhappy, and hated me for it. We had nothing in com-

mon. It was just a piece of sheer madness, our marriage. He swept me off my feet. I never had a great deal of sense, and I lost it all then. I was far happier when he had left me."

"Left you?"

"He deserted me almost directly we reached America." She laughed. "I told you I had grown to understand the realities. I began then."

I was horrified. For the first time I realized vividly all that she had gone through. When she had spoken to me before of her struggles, that evening over the study fire, I had supposed that they had begun only after her husband's death, and that her life with him had in some measure trained her for the fight. That she should have been pitched into the arena, a mere child, with no experience of life, appalled me. As she spoke there came to me the knowledge that now I could never do what I had come to do.

I could not give her up! She needed me. I tried not to think of Cynthia.

"Audrey," I said, taking her hand, "I came here to say good-by. I can't. I want you. Nothing matters except you. I won't give you up!"

"It's too late," she said, with a little catch in her voice. "You are engaged to Mrs. Ford."

"I am engaged, but not to Mrs. Ford. I am engaged to some one you have never met—Cynthia Drassilis."

She pulled her hand away quickly, wide-eyed, and for some moments she was silent.

"Do you love her?" she asked at last.

"No."

"Does she love you?"

Cynthia's letter rose before my eyes—that letter which could have had no meaning but one.

"I am afraid she does," I said.

Audrey looked at me steadily. Her face was very pale.

"You must marry her, Peter."

I shook my head.

"You must! She believes in you."

"I can't. I want you, and you need me. Can you deny that you need me?"

"No."

She said it quite simply, without emotion. I moved toward her, thrilling, but she stepped back.

"She needs you, too," she said.

A dull despair was creeping over me. I was weighed down by a premonition of

failure. I had fought my conscience, my sense of duty and honor, and had crushed them. She was raising them up against me once more. My self-control broke down.

"Audrey," I cried, "for Heaven's sake, can't you see what you're doing? We have been given a second chance. Our happiness is in your hands again, and you are throwing it away. Why should we make ourselves wretched for the whole of our lives? What does anything else matter except that we love each other? Why should we let anything stand in our way? I won't give you up!"

She did not answer. Her eyes were fixed on the ground. Hope began to revive in me, telling me that I had persuaded her; but when she looked up it was with the same steady gaze, and my heart sank again.

"Peter," she said, "I want to tell you something. It will make you understand, I think. I haven't been honest, Peter. I have not fought fairly. All these weeks, ever since we met, I have been trying to steal you. It's the only word. I have tried every miserable little trick I could think of to steal you from the girl you had promised to marry. She wasn't here to fight for herself. I didn't think of her. I was wrapped up in my own selfishness. Then, after that night, when you had gone away, I thought it all out. I had a sort of awakening. I saw the part I had been playing. I tried to persuade myself that there was no harm done. I even told myself that I had done something rather fine. I thought, you see, at that time that you were infatuated with Mrs. Ford—and I know Mrs. Ford. If she is capable of loving any man, she loves Mr. Ford, though they are divorced. I knew she would only make you unhappy. I told myself I was saving you. Then you told me it was not Mrs. Ford, but this other girl. That altered everything. Don't you see that I can't let you give her up now? You would despise me. I shouldn't feel clean. I should feel as if I had stabbed her in the back!"

I forced a laugh. It ran hollow against the barrier that separated us. In my heart I knew that this barrier was not to be laughed away.

"Can't you see, Peter? You must see!"

"I certainly don't. I think you're overstrained, and that you have let your imagination run away with you. I—"

She interrupted me.

"Do you remember that evening in the

study?" she asked abruptly. "We had been talking. I had been telling you how I had lived during those five years."

"I remember."

"Every word I spoke was spoken with an object—calculated. I knew you, you see, Peter. I knew you through and through, because I loved you, and I knew the effect those tales would have on you. Oh, they were all true! I was honest as far as that goes; but they had the mean motive at the back of them. I was playing on your feelings. I knew how kind you were, how you would pity me. I set myself to create an image which would stay in your mind and kill the memory of the other girl—the image of a poor, ill-treated little creature who should work through to your heart by way of your compassion. I knew you, Peter, I knew you! And then I did a meaner thing still. I pretended to stumble in the dark. I meant you to catch me and hold me, and you did. And—"

Her voice broke off.

"I'm glad I have told you," she said, after a pause. "It makes it a little better. You understand how I feel, don't you?" She held out her hand. "Good-by!"

"I am not going to give you up," I said doggedly.

"Good-by!" she said again.

Her voice was a whisper. I took her hand and began to draw her toward me.

"It is not good-by. There is no one else in the world but you, and I am not going to give you up!"

"Peter!" She struggled feebly. "Oh, let me go!"

I drew her nearer.

"I won't let you go!" I said.

But, as I spoke, there came the sound of automobile wheels on the gravel. A large red car was coming up the drive. I dropped Audrey's hand, and she stepped back and was lost in the shrubbery.

The car slowed down and stopped beside me. There were two women in it. One, who was dark and handsome, I did not know; the other was Mrs. Drassilis.

XXXII

I HAD no time to wonder how Cynthia's mother came to be in the grounds of Sanstead House, for her companion, almost before the car had stopped, jumped out and clutched me by the arm, at the same time uttering this cryptic speech:

"Whatever he offers I'll double!"

She fixed me, as she spoke, with a commanding eye. She was a woman, I gathered in that instant, born to command. There seemed, at any rate, no doubt in her mind that she could command *me*. If I had been a black beetle she could not have looked at me with a more scornful superiority.

Her eyes were very large and of a rich, fiery-brown color; and it was these that gave me my first suspicion of her identity. As to the meaning of her words, however, I had no clue.

"Bear that in mind," she went on. "I'll double it, if it's a million dollars!"

"I'm afraid I don't understand," I said, finding speech.

She clicked her tongue impatiently.

"There's no need to be so cautious and mysterious. This lady is a friend of mine. She knows all about it. I asked her to come. I'm Mrs. Elmer Ford. I came here directly I got your letter. I think you're the lowest sort of scoundrel that ever managed to keep out of jail, but that needn't make any difference just now. We're here to talk business, Mr. Fisher, so we may as well begin!"

I was getting tired of being taken for Smooth Sam.

"I am not Smooth Sam Fisher," I said. I turned to the automobile. "Will you identify me, Mrs. Drassilis?"

She was regarding me with wide-open eyes.

"What on earth are you doing down here? I have been trying everywhere to find you, but nobody—"

Mrs. Ford interrupted her. She gave me the impression of being a woman who wanted a good deal of the conversation, and who did not care how she got it. She swept over Mrs. Drassilis like some tidal wave, blotting her out.

"Oh!" she said, fixing her brown eyes, less scornful now, but still imperious, on mine. "I must apologize. I have made a mistake. I took you for a low villain named Sam Fisher. I hope you will forgive me. I was to have met him at this exact spot just about this time, by appointment, so, seeing you here, I mistook you for him."

"If I might have a word with you alone?" I said.

Mrs. Ford had a short way with people. In matters concerning her own wishes she took their acquiescence for granted.

"Drive on up to the house, Jarvis," she said, and Mrs. Drassilis was whirled away round the curve of the drive before she knew what had happened to her. "Well?"

"My name is Burns," I said.

"Now I understand," she said. "I know who you are now." She paused, and I was expecting her to fawn upon me for my gallant service in her cause, when she resumed in quite a different strain: "I can't think what you can have been about, Mr. Burns, not to have been able to do what Cynthia asked you. Surely, in all these weeks and months—and then, after all, to have let this Fisher scoundrel steal him away from under your nose!"

She gave me a fleeting glance of unfathomable scorn. When I thought of all the sufferings I had gone through that term owing to her repulsive son and, indirectly, for her sake, I felt that the time had come to speak out.

"May I describe the way in which I allowed your son to be stolen away from under my nose?" I said.

In well-chosen words I sketched the outline of what had happened. I did not omit to lay stress on the fact that the Nugget's departure with the enemy was entirely voluntary. She heard me out in silence.

"That was too bad of Oggie!" she said tolerantly, when I had ceased dramatically on the climax of my tale. As a comment it seemed to me inadequate. "Oggie was always high-spirited," she went on. "No doubt you have noticed that?"

"A little."

"He could be led, but never driven. With the best intentions, no doubt, you refused to allow him to leave the stables that night and return to the house, and he resented the check and took the matter into his own hands." She broke off, and looked at her watch. "Have you a watch? What time is it? Only that? I thought it must be later. I arrived too soon. I got a letter from this man Fisher, naming this spot and this hour for a meeting, when we could discuss terms. He said that he had written to Mr. Ford, appointing the same time." She frowned. "I have no doubt he will come," she said coldly.

"Perhaps this is his car," I said.

A second automobile was whirring up the drive. There was a shout as it came within sight of us, and the chauffeur put on the brake. A man sprang from the car.

He jerked a word to the chauffeur, and the automobile went on up the drive.

He was a massively built man of middle age, with powerful shoulders and a face—when he had removed his motor-goggles—very like any one of half a dozen of those Roman emperors whose features have come down to us on coins and statues, square-jawed, clean-shaven, and aggressive. Like his former wife—who was now standing, drawn up to her full height, staring haughtily at him—he had the air of one born to command.

I should imagine that the married life of these two must have been something more of a battle even than most married lives. The clashing of those wills must have smacked of the nature of the imaginary collision between an immovable mass and an irresistible force.

He met Mrs. Ford's stare with one equally militant, then turned to me.

"I'll give you double what she has offered you!" he said. He paused and eyed me with loathing. "You infernal scoundrel!" he added.

Custom ought to have rendered me immune to irritation, but it had not. I spoke my mind.

"One of these days, Mr. Ford," I said, "I am going to publish a directory of the names and addresses of the people who have mistaken me for Smooth Sam Fisher. I am *not* Sam Fisher. Can you grasp that? My name is Peter Burns, and for the past term I have been a master at this school. And I may say that, judging from what I know of the little brute, any one who kidnaped your son as much as two days ago will be so anxious by now to get rid of him that he will probably want to pay you for taking him back!"

My words almost had the effect of bringing this divorced couple together again. They made common cause against me. It was probably the first time in years that they had formed even a temporary alliance.

"How dare you talk like that?" said Mrs. Ford. "Oggie is a sweet boy in every respect!"

"You're perfectly right, Nesta," said Mr. Ford. "He may want intelligent handling, but he's a mighty fine boy. I shall make inquiries, and if this man has been ill-treating Ogden, I shall complain to Mr. Abney. Where is this man Fisher?" he broke off abruptly.

"On the spot!" said an affable voice.

The bushes behind me parted, and Smooth Sam stepped out on the gravel.

I had recognized him by his voice. I certainly should not have done so by his appearance. He had taken the precaution of "making up" for this important meeting. A white wig of indescribable respectability peeped out beneath his black hat. His eyes twinkled from under two penthouses of white eyebrows. A white mustache covered his mouth. He was venerable to a degree.

He nodded to me, and bared his white head gallantly to Mrs. Ford.

"No worse for our little outing, Mr. Burns, I am glad to see! Mrs. Ford, I must apologize for my apparent unpunctuality, but I was not really behind time. I have been waiting in the bushes. I thought it just possible that you might have brought unwelcome members of the police force with you, and I have been scouting, as it were, before making my advance. I see, however, that all is well, and we can come at once to business. May I say, before we begin, that I overheard your recent conversation, and that I entirely disagree with Mr. Burns? Master Ford is a charming boy. Already I feel like an elder brother to him. I am truly loath to part with him."

"How much?" snapped Mr. Ford. "You've got me. How much do you want?"

"I'll give you double what he offers!" cried Mrs. Ford.

Sam held up his hand, his old pontifical manner intensified by the white wig.

"May I speak? Thank you. This is a little embarrassing. When I asked you both to meet me here, it was not for the purpose of holding an auction. I had a straightforward business proposition to make to you. It will necessitate a certain amount of plain and somewhat personal speaking. May I proceed? Thank you. I will be as brief as possible."

His eloquence appeared to have had a soothing effect on the two Fords. They remained silent.

"You must understand," said Sam, "that I am speaking as an expert. I have been in the kidnaping business many years, and I know what I am talking about. And I tell you that the moment you two got your divorce you said good-by to all peace and quiet. Bless you"—Sam's manner became fatherly—"I've seen it a

hundred times. Couple get divorced, and, if there's a child, what happens? They start in playing battledore and shuttlecock with him. Wife sneaks him from husband. Husband sneaks him back from wife. After a while, along comes a gentleman in my line of business, a professional at the game, and he puts one across on both the amateurs. He takes advantage of the confusion, slips in, and gets away with the kid. That's what has happened here, and I'm going to show you the way to stop it. I'll make you a proposition. What you want to do"—I have never heard anything so soothing, so suggestive of the old family friend healing an unfortunate breach, as Sam's voice at this juncture—"what you want to do is to get together again right quick. Never mind the past! Let bygones be bygones. Kiss and be friends!"

A snort from Mr. Ford checked him for a moment, but he resumed.

"I guess there were faults on both sides. Get together and talk it over; and when you've agreed to call the fight off and start fair again, that's where I come in. Mr. Burns here will tell you, if you ask him, that I'm anxious to quit this business and marry and settle down. Well, see here. What you want to do is to give me a salary—we can talk figures later on—to stay by you and watch over the kid. Don't snort—I'm talking plain sense. You'd a sight better have me with you than against you. Set a thief to catch a thief. What I don't know about the fine points of the game isn't worth knowing. I'll guarantee, if you put me in charge, to see that nobody comes within a hundred miles of the kid unless he has a signed order from you. You'll find that I shall earn every penny of my salary. Mr. Burns and I will now take a turn up the drive while you think it over."

He linked his arm in mine and drew me away. As we turned the corner of the drive I caught a glimpse over my shoulder of the Little Nugget's parents. They were standing where we had left them, as if Sam's eloquence had rooted them to the spot.

"Well, well, well, young man!" said Sam, eying me affectionately. "It's pleasant to meet you again under happier conditions than last time. You certainly have all the luck, sonny, or you would have been badly hurt that night. I was getting scared how the thing would end. Buck's a plain rough-neck, and his gang are as bad as he

is, and they were mighty sore on you—mighty sore. If they had grabbed you there's no knowing what might not have happened. However, all's well that ends well, and this little game has surely had a happy ending. I shall get that job, sonny! Old man Ford isn't a fool, and it won't take him long, when he gets to thinking it over, to see that I'm right. He'll hire me, I know."

"Aren't you rather reckoning without your partner?" I said. "Where does Buck MacGinnis come in on the deal?"

Sam patted my shoulder paternally.

"He doesn't, sonny, he doesn't. It was a shame to do it—it was like taking candy from a kid—but business is business, and I was reluctantly compelled to double-cross poor old Buck. I sneaked the Nugget away from him next day. It's not worth talking about; it was too easy. Buck's all right in a rough-and-tumble, but when it comes to brains he gets left, and so he'll go on through life, poor fellow! I hate to think of it."

He sighed. Buck's misfortunes seemed to move him deeply.

"I shouldn't be surprised if he gave up the profession after this. He has had enough to discourage him. I told you about what happened to him that night, didn't I? No? I thought I had. Why, Buck was the guy who did the Steve Brodie act through the roof; and, when we picked him up, we found he'd broken his leg again! Isn't that enough to jar a man? I guess he'll retire from the business. He isn't intended for it."

We were approaching the two automobiles now; and, looking back, I saw Mr. and Mrs. Ford walking up the drive. Sam followed my gaze, and I heard him chuckle.

"It's all right," he said. "They've fixed it up. Something in the way they're walking tells me they've fixed it up."

Mrs. Drassilis was still sitting in the red automobile, looking piqued but resigned. Mrs. Ford addressed her.

"I shall have to leave you, Mrs. Drassilis," she said. "Tell Jarvis to drive you wherever you want to go. I am going with my husband to see my boy Oggie."

She stretched out a hand toward the millionaire. He caught it in his, and they stood there, smiling foolishly at each other, while Sam, almost purring, brooded over them like a stout fairy queen. The two chauffeurs looked on woodenly.

Mr. Ford released his wife's hand and turned to Sam.

"Fisher!"

"Sir?"

"I've been considering your proposition. There's a string tied to it."

"Oh, no, sir, I assure you!"

"There is. What guarantee have I that you won't double-cross me?"

Sam smiled, relieved.

"You forget that I told you I was about to be married, sir. My wife won't let me!"

Mr. Ford waved his hand toward the automobile.

"Jump in," he said briefly. "And tell him where to drive to. You're engaged!"

XXXIII

"No manners!" said Mrs. Drassilis. "None whatever. I always said so."

She spoke bitterly. She was following the automobile with an offended eye, as it moved down the drive.

The car rounded the corner. Sam turned and waved a farewell. Mr. and Mrs. Ford, seated close together, did not even look round.

Mrs. Drassilis sniffed disgustedly.

"She's a friend of Cynthia's. Cynthia asked me to come down here with her to see you. I came, to oblige her; and now, without a word of apology, she leaves me stranded. She has no manners whatever!"

I offered no defense of the absent one. The verdict more or less squared with my own opinion.

"Is Cynthia back in England?" I asked, to change the subject.

"The yacht got back yesterday. Peter, I have something of the utmost importance to speak to you about." She glanced at Jarvis, the chauffeur, leaning back in his seat with the air, peculiar to chauffeurs in repose, of being stuffed. "Walk down the drive with me."

I helped her out of the car, and we set off in silence. There was a suppressed excitement in my companion's manner which interested me, as well as something furtive which brought back all my old dislike of her. I could not imagine what she could have to say to me that had brought her all these miles.

"How do you come to be down here?" she said. "When Cynthia told me you were here I could hardly believe her. Why are you a master at this school? I cannot understand it!"

"What did you want to see me about?" I asked.

She hesitated. It was always an effort for her to be direct; and now, apparently, the effort was too great. The next moment she had rambled off on some tortuous by-path of her own, which, though it presumably led in the end to her destination, was evidently a long way round.

"I have known you for so many years now, Peter, and I don't know of anybody whose character I admire more. You are so generous—quixotic, in fact. You are one of the few really unselfish men I have ever met. You are always thinking of other people. Whatever it cost you, I know you would not hesitate to give up anything if you felt that it was for some one else's happiness. I do admire you so for it! One meets so few young men nowadays who consider anybody except themselves."

She paused, either for breath or for fresh ideas; and I took advantage of the lull in the rain of bouquets to repeat my question.

"What *did* you want to see me about?" I asked patiently.

"About Cynthia. She asked me to see you."

"Oh!"

"You got a letter from her?"

"Yes."

"Last night, when she came home, she told me about it, and showed me your answer. It was a beautiful letter, Peter. I cried when I read it; and Cynthia did, I feel certain. Of course, to a girl of her character that letter was final. She is so loyal, dear child!"

"I don't understand."

As Sam would have said, she seemed to be speaking; words appeared to be fluttering from her; but her meaning was entirely beyond me.

"Once she has given her promise, I am sure nothing would induce her to break it, whatever her private feelings. She is so loyal! She has such character!"

"Would you mind being a little clearer?" I said sharply. "I really don't understand what it is you are trying to tell me. What do you mean about loyalty and character? I don't understand."

She was not to be hustled from her by-path. She had chosen her route, and she meant to travel by it, ignoring short-cuts.

"To Cynthia, as I say, it was final. She simply could not see that the matter

was not irrevocably settled. I thought it so fine of her! But I am her mother, and it was my duty not to give in and accept the situation as inevitable while there was anything I could do for her happiness. I knew your chivalrous, unselfish nature, Peter. I could speak to you as Cynthia could not. I could appeal to your generosity in a way impossible, of course, for her. I could put the whole facts of the case clearly before you."

I snatched at the words.

"I wish you would! What are they?"

She rambled off again.

"She has such a rigid sense of duty! There is no arguing with her. I told her that if you knew you would not dream of standing in her way. You are so generous, such a true friend, that your only thought would be for her. If her happiness depended on your releasing her from her promise, you would not think of yourself. So in the end I took matters into my own hands and came to see you. I am sorry for you, dear Peter, but to me Cynthia's happiness, of course, must come before everything. You understand, don't you?"

Gradually, as she was speaking, I had begun to grasp hesitatingly at her meaning—hesitatingly, because the first hint of it had stirred me to such a whirl of hope that I feared to risk the shock of finding that after all I had been mistaken. If I were right—and surely she could mean nothing else—I was free, free with honor. But I could not live on hints. I must hear this thing in words.

"Has—has Cynthia—" I stopped, to steady my voice. "Has Cynthia found—" I stopped again. I was finding it absurdly difficult to frame my sentence. "Is there some one else?" I concluded with a rush.

Mrs. Drassilis patted my arm sympathetically.

"Be brave, Peter!"

"There is?"

"Yes."

The trees, the drive, the turf, the sky, the birds, the house, the automobile, and Jarvis, the stuffed chauffeur, leaped together for an instant in one whirling, dancing mass of which I was the center. Then, out of the chaos, as it separated itself once more into its component parts, I heard my voice saying:

"Tell me!"

The world was itself again, and I was listening quietly and with a mild interest

which, try as I would, I could not make any stronger. I had exhausted my emotion on the essential fact; the details were an anticlimax.

"I liked him directly I saw him," said Mrs. Drassilis. "And, of course, as he was such a friend of yours, we naturally—"

"A friend of mine?"

"I am speaking of Lord Mountry."

"Mountry? What about him?" Light flooded in on my numbed brain. "You don't mean—! Is it Lord Mountry?"

My manner must have misled her. She stammered in her eagerness to dispel what she took to be my misapprehension.

"Don't think that he acted in anything but the most honorable manner. Nothing could be further from the truth. He knew nothing of Cynthia's engagement to you. She told him when he asked her to marry him, and he—as a matter of fact, it was he who insisted on dear Cynthia writing that letter to you."

She stopped, apparently staggered by this excursion into honesty.

"Well?"

"In fact, he dictated it."

"Oh!"

"Unfortunately, it was quite the wrong sort of letter. It was the very opposite of clear. It can have given you no inkling of the real state of affairs."

"It certainly did not!"

"He would not allow her to alter it in any way. He is very obstinate at times, like so many shy men. And when your answer came, you see, things were worse than before."

"I suppose so."

"I could see last night how unhappy they both were; and when Cynthia suggested it, I agreed at once to come to you and tell you everything."

She looked at me anxiously. From her point of view this was the climax, the supreme moment. She hesitated. I seemed to see her marshaling her forces, the telling sentences, the persuasive adjectives; rallying them together for the grand assault.

But through the trees I caught a glimpse of Audrey walking on the lawn; and the assault was never made.

"I will write to Cynthia to-night," I said, "wishing her happiness."

"Oh, Peter!" said Mrs. Drassilis.

"Don't mention it," said I.

Doubts appeared to mar her perfect contentment.

"You are sure you can convince her?"

"Convince her?"

"And—er—Lord Mountry. He is so determined not to do anything—er—that he would call unsportsmanlike!"

"Perhaps I had better tell her I am going to marry some one else," I suggested.

"I think that would be an excellent idea," she said, brightening visibly. "How clever of you to have thought of it!" She permitted herself a truism. "After all, dear Peter, there are plenty of nice girls in the world. You have only to look for them."

"You're perfectly right," I said. "I'll start at once!"

A gleam of white—Audrey's dress—caught my eye through the trees by the lawn. I moved toward it at a fairly rapid pace.

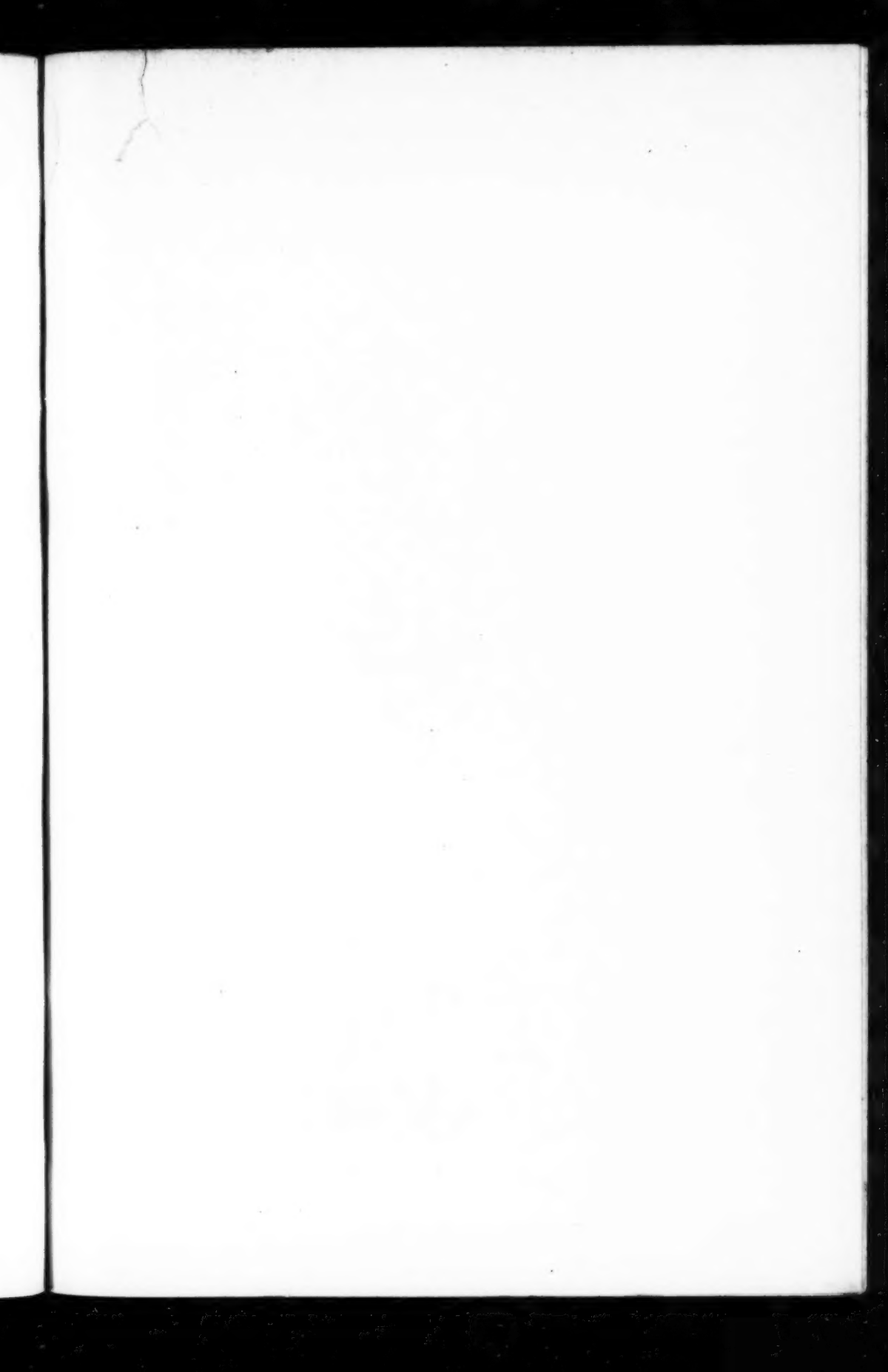
THE END

EDITOR'S NOTE—The book-length novel to be published complete in the next number of *MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE* will be "The Wasp," by Theodore Goodridge Roberts, author of "Jess of the River."

In his new story Mr. Roberts leaves the well-worn track of contemporary fiction and strikes off into the tropical seas of romance. The scene of "The Wasp" is laid in the West Indies, in the adventurous days of two centuries ago. It brings to the reader's nostrils the scent of steaming casks broached upon the decks of piratical craft; the soft, sweet scent of secluded islands where the rovers of the sea hid their stolen treasure; and the sulfurous smoke of desperate battles fought on the blue Caribbean.

Truly a striking figure is its hero, a gentleman of fallen fortunes, who hoists the pirate flag and becomes the scourge of those lawless waters. He rises to picturesque heights of rascality which compel admiration, and sinks to deeds of violence which make the heart contract; but throughout his violent career there lives in him a spark of manhood and patriotism, which flames into a terrific conflagration and cleanses his soul at the last. There is a love-note, too, in the tale, for a woman comes into his adventurous life and casts her soft spell upon him.

This series of novels began with "The Flying Courtship," by E. J. Rath, published complete in the June number of *MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE*, and "The Kangaroo," by Harris Dickson, printed in July. The numbers containing these stories are still in stock, and can be ordered from any newsdealer, or from the publishers, price fifteen cents.





"AS SOON AS I CAN EARN FIVE THOUSAND A YEAR, I'LL MARRY YOU!"

Drawn by C. D. Williams

[See story, "The Friendliness of Puppins," page 97!]